

Strategic Directions to Improve the Habilitation Process for Individuals with Disabilities

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Abstract

Introduction. Issues of habilitation of individuals with severe and multiple developmental disabilities are relevant in the educational systems of different countries. There is a contradiction between the need for habilitation of individuals with disabilities and the lack of necessary conditions for its implementation. The importance of continuing education for individuals with severe and multiple developmental disabilities is to train life skills, to develop social skills, and to develop 'viable' personality. With regard to individuals with severe and multiple developmental disabilities, the concept of 'viable personality' refers to an individual who is able to carry out household and work activities at a corresponding level, interact with others, follow the rules of safe behavior and therefore feels comfortable and secure in society. **Theoretical justification.** The issue of disability habilitation has been studied using theoretical methods, including analysis of psychological and educational research in this area, educational regulations for individuals with severe and multiple disabilities, and the current practice of habilitation for individuals with severe and multiple developmental disabilities over the age of 18 years. **Discussion.** A list of strategic directions to improve the habilitation process with a brief description of each direction is proposed, including (a) adoption of the Concept of Continuing Education for individuals with severe and multiple developmental disabilities; (b) creation of a program of interdepartmental interaction aimed at maintaining organizational and substantive continuity in habilitation of individuals with severe and multiple developmental disabilities; (c) interdisciplinary scientific research on systematization and development of diagnostic tools to identify the

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potential capabilities of individuals with severe and multiple developmental disabilities; (d) development of multi-module variable educational plans and training programs as the basis for the implementation of multi-level educational content; (e) inclusion of deontological issues in the educational program for teacher retraining and advanced training; (f) vocational training and providing safe workplaces in the labor market.

Keywords

habilitation, multiple developmental disorders, continuing education, life and socialization skills, adaptive developmental environment, interdepartmental coordination, succession and continuity

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Introduction

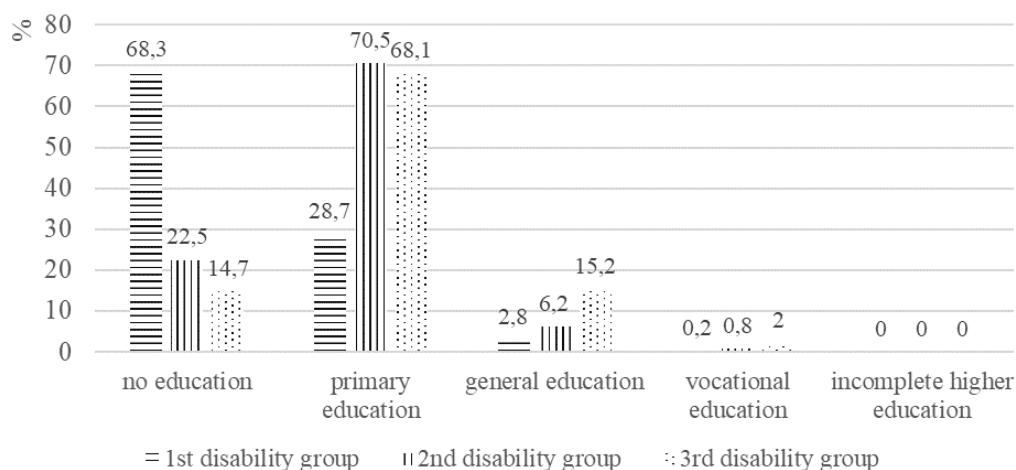
In modern society, unique human individuality, its characteristics and the most important needs are recognized as absolute values. The most important needs include training and education. It is training that enables individuals to reveal their inner potential, which is especially important for individuals with severe health and developmental disabilities to be as high as possible involved in social life (Shpek, 2003; Tsarev, 2015). First, when talking about individuals with serious health and developmental disorders, we refer to students with severe and multiple developmental disabilities (hereinafter referred to as SMDD), as identified in special education. SMDD patients are characterized by severe mental disorders combined with sensory, motor, and communication disorders.

Continuing education is important for individuals with SMDD. In the process of learning, they develop higher mental functions and form the most important skills to live and work in the social environment. As a result, the level of independence and social importance of individuals with SMDD increase, and their quality of life and family life also improves (Lisovskaya, 2015b; Lisovskaya, 2016c).

Figure 1 shows the educational level of individuals with disabilities.

Figure 1 shows that the majority (68.3 %) of individuals with disabilities of the first group living in psychoneurological boarding schools in the republic have no education; 28.7 % of individuals have only primary education; 2.8 % of individuals have general education (9 grades); 0.2 % of individuals have vocational education.

Figure 1
Educational level of individuals with disabilities



Another important outcome related to the education of individuals with SMDD is their professional training. Work activity is a critical part of SMDD individuals' lives (Robitaille, 2010). Work activities at the level corresponding to this category of individuals enable them to feel like important members of society, as people around them. Work activity is the most important condition for the socialization of individuals with SMDD. As a result, issues related to assisted employment and assisted housing for individuals with SMDD have recently been examined in special education (Lisovskaya, 2016; Lisovskaya, 2015b; Tsarev, 2015).

Therefore, it is impossible to talk about comprehensive habilitation and rehabilitation of individuals with SMDD without solving educational issues in the field of vocational training.

Another social effect of the continuing education of individuals with SMDD is to develop social and life skills, and to promote positive attitudes towards interaction with them and to change public opinion on the possibilities of including this category of citizens in social life (Malofeev, Nikol'skaya, Kukushkina, & Goncharova, 2010; Konopleva, 2011). The possibility of the development of SMDD individuals is considered on the basis of activity and social activity in the environment (Bondar' & Karanevskaya, 2020; Filatova, 2018; Filatova & Karakulova, 2017). Over the past decade, social demands (from both the state and parents) have changed in order to increase the subjective and social viability of individuals with disabilities who, as far as possible, can participate in society's life (Lisovskaya, 2015a).

The object of our research is the national system of continuing education of individuals with SMDD, which determines the possibility of their habilitation and aims to improve their

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ability to form a viable personality. We define the concept of 'viable personality' as an *individual who is able to carry out family and work activities at a corresponding level, who is able to interact with others, who knows how to follow the rules of safe behavior, and who therefore feels confident and comfortable in society*. Therefore, such a habilitation system should contribute to improving the quality of life of SMDD individuals and their families and ensuring the highest level of socialization in society.

Theoretical justification

During the study, we used theoretical analysis of sociological, psychological, and educational literature to study the education and socialization of individuals with SMDD, and the method of logical reasoning. We examined the legislative and regulatory framework of special education, explored and summarized the experience of organizing education, assisted employment and assisted housing for individuals with SMDD.

Objectives of improving the process of habilitation of individuals with SMDD

The main challenge (contradiction) is the contradiction between the need for continuing education of adults with SMDD aged 18 years and older, which is the basis of their habilitation, and the immaturity of such national continuing education systems for this category of citizens (Malofeev et al., 2010).

In our view, this contradiction can be overcome by solving certain tasks. Let us consider the possibility of addressing them, for example, through the education system of the Republic of Belarus.

The first task is to implement the main provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, especially the requirement that States Parties ensure access to education and professional training for adults with disabilities throughout their lives, laid down in Article 24(5) (the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006).

The second task is to create conditions for the implementation of interdepartmental approaches to ensure continuous habilitation of individuals with SMDD and to coordinate the activities of the three most important ministries – education, health, labor and social protection, which can ensure its complexity, substantive integrity, and continuity (Lisovskaya, 2016, Lisovskaya, 2015c).

The solution of *the third task* is related to the focus on individuality- and personality-related approaches when constructing a continuing habilitation system for individuals with SMDD. Attention to the experiences, needs, aspirations, inner meanings of a person with a disability, interest in his/her inner world, determine the choice of methodology approaches in working with students with SMDD (Attwood, 2010). In this case, the task of maximizing the individual potential of each person, supporting and helping him/her

in his desire to value, respect and express himself, comes first. This approach is a feature of the existential approach in education, especially in the education of individuals with SMDD (Konopleva, 2011).

The fourth task is to focus the vector of attention on the creation of an adaptive learning environment. The essence of such an environment is the need to adapt it to the special educational needs of SMDD students, while contributing to adjusting individuals with disabilities to social conditions and promoting the development of their personalities (Ayres, 2018; Gopnik & Meltzoff, 1997). When organizing such an environment, the age and individual characteristics of students should be taken into account, and the environment must be open to the necessary changes. Therefore, it must not only develop students, but also develop itself (Gaidukevich, 2010; Boyarshinova & Paikova, 2018; Lisovskaya & Maller, 2022). To create an adaptive environment, it is possible to use projective and playful methods, for example, fairytale therapy (Gneusheva, Shcherbakova, 2022).

The solution of *the fifth task* is related to scientific and methodological support and the development of educational and methodological materials for continuing education of individuals with SMDD, which is necessary for their habilitation. It must be taken into account that the characteristics of development and the nature of the special educational needs of this category of students require a maximum reduction in the academic component of the education content and a corresponding expansion of the component related to the development of life skills of individuals with SMDD. In this case, the possibility of socialization and adaptation to society will be ensured (Malofeev et al., 2010).

The sixth task is to prepare a multidisciplinary team of experts who understand the characteristics of specific developmental stages of individuals with SMDD, educational tasks and the tasks that ensure their comprehensive habilitation, who are psychologically and methodologically prepared to work with this category of students, who are able to work in a team and to work with the families of individuals with SMDD (Muzdybaev, 2009; Lemekh, 2022).

The importance of solving *the seventh task* is determined by the importance of creating conditions for the vocational training of individuals with SMDD, their preparation for assisted employment and assisted housing (Lisovskaya, 2015b).

Finally, *the eighth task* relates to the need to create protected employment opportunities in the labor market for adults with SMDD, taking into account their professional training.

Discussion

Strategic directions for improving the habilitation process

The identification of the main challenge and tasks aimed at its resolving has enabled the identification of strategic directions to improve the process of habilitation of individuals

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with SMDD. Each strategic direction consistently reveals the solution to the above-mentioned tasks of improving the habilitation process for individuals with disabilities and presents a brief commentary. The main challenge is to integrate SMDD patients into the objective and social world, ensuring their participation in everyday activities such as work, economics, art and creativity – all of which contribute to dependency as a form of secondary disability.

Adoption of the Concept of Continuous Education of Individuals with SMDD

Commentary. The Concept provides the main provisions to support the main ideas of education for individuals with disabilities under modern circumstances in a rapidly changing world – continuing education. These provisions clearly define the implementation of this idea for individuals with SMDD and take into account the characteristics of the country's modern educational situation. This concept not only shows the essence of the provision of continuing education, but also reveals the aim of such education for this category of students, its main tasks, principles, functions and implementation conditions.

The concept is based on basic legal documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the World Declaration on Education for All. These documents represent the basic idea – the right of every person to receive a high-quality education that meets his/her educational needs (Maslow, 2013).

The special educational needs of individuals with SMDD include acquiring basic skills such as the ability to express thoughts with verbal means of communication, the ability to read, write and count at a corresponding level, and the readiness to solve complex and difficult tasks. In addition to skills, the special needs also include values, knowledge, and ideas that help people solve various life problems in order to improve the quality of their lives, to participate in activities useful to society, to perform tasks related to individuals' self-development, and to ensure their vitality.

The concept was based on several ideas that defined the value of continuing education presented in the 1968 UNESCO Document (Vinogradov & Shkatulla, 1994). These ideas are related to the most important areas of education that determine their results for the individual:

- Learning to study, learning new things, developing curiosity, cognitive interest, and interest in cultural values, particularly in the development of information culture.
- Learning to apply knowledge in practice, use it to solve practical and research problems, and prepare for the development of future professional activities.
- Learning to cooperate with others in various activities, communicate in friendly and open ways and treat partners in activities with attention.
- Learning to formulate and express individual opinions, develop imagination and creativity.

Creation of an Interdepartmental Cooperation Program that ensures continuity both in the content of continuing education for students with SMDD and its organization

Table 1 shows the organization of continuing education and comprehensive support for students with SMDD. It also presents organizations of various departments that ensure this continuity.

Table 1

The system of continuing education and comprehensive support for individuals with SMDD

Age	Educational organizations	Health care organizations	Social protection organizations	Type of assistance
Infancy and early childhood	CCRE&R	Early comprehensive care in polyclinics, children's homes	—	early correctional and pedagogical assistance, medical care
Preschool age	CCRE&R	—	orphanages for preschool children with disorders in psychophysical development	education, support, medical care
School age	CCRE&R	—	boarding schools for children with special needs of psychophysical development	education, support, medical care
Adults (aged ≥ 18)	RSSC	—	psychoneurological boarding schools for the disabled and elderly	support, medical care

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Currently, it is necessary not only to ensure the continuity of education and comprehensive support for individuals with SMDD, but also to ensure the continuity of education content for this category of citizens.

Commentary. This Program can be characterized in a number of areas of activity:

- Establishing a unified information environment with data on SMDD graduates, including the Centres for Correctional and Developmental Education and Rehabilitation (CCRE&R) and the Regional Social Services Centres (RSSC).
- Providing the most appropriate conditions for the development of SMDD graduates within the framework of the activities of the RSSC.
- Providing information to graduates and their families on future prospects after graduation from the CCRE&R.
- Preparing the necessary documentation to ensure continuity of support for the transition of graduates and their families by RSSC experts.
- Updating the RSSC database with data on CCRE&R graduates.
- Methodological support to RSSC experts on the content and methods of work with SMDD graduates.
- Coordinating work with the Committee on Labor, Employment and Social Protection of the Population on the issues of continuity of the transition of CCRE&R graduates to the RSSC and the database exchange.

Table 2
Goal content of each stage of the Plan

Stage	Goal
Preparatory	Providing complete information on CCRE&R graduates and their families to RSSC
Adaptation	Development of an individual rehabilitation program for CCRE&R graduates
Basic	Direct work on the social rehabilitation of individuals with SMDD admitted to RSSC
Control/evaluation	Assessment of the effectiveness of interdepartmental interaction in the process of transition of CCRE&R graduates to the TCSO and the dynamics of social development of individuals with SMDD

Table 2 presents the goals for each of the four phases of the inter-departmental communication plan. Let us consider the tasks of each stage, the expected results and indicators for achieving the expected results.

The transition algorithm involves the following four stages – *preparatory*, *adaptation*, *basic* and *control/evaluation*. In addition to goals, each stage performs specific tasks.

The tasks of *the preparatory stage* include:

- Obtaining information by RSSC experts about the characteristics of CCRE&R graduates and the special housing conditions that they may need.
- Conducting open lessons, correctional classes with the invitation of RSSC experts and parents of graduates.
- Organizing round tables where principles, content and methods of working with graduates are discussed and agreed.
- Meeting parents of graduates with RSSC experts, getting acquainted with the work schedule of the institution and day care department for young persons with disabilities, its arrangement, rules of conduct.
- Preparing supplementary documents for graduates by CCRE&R employees and providing these documents to RSSC.

The tasks of *the adaptation stage* include:

- Forming friendly attitudes, sensitivity and tolerance towards individuals with SMDD among RSSC staff.
- Organizing a barrier-free and adaptive spatial environment at RSSC for the full personal development of individuals with SMDD.
- Planning work in RSSC day care services, taking into account the needs of newly admitted CCRE&R graduates.
- Developing individual rehabilitation programs for CCRE&R graduates.

The tasks of *the basic stage* include:

- creating equal opportunities and access for individuals with SMDD to participate in various forms of public life, including active social interaction.
- promoting the achievement of the maximum independence for individuals with SMDD.

The tasks of *the control/evaluation stage* include:

- Assessing the effectiveness of inter-departmental interactions in the process of CCRE&R graduates' transition to RSSC.
- Assessing the results of the activities of RSSC and CCRE&R.
- Analyzing the existing achievements and identifying ways to improve the work on social rehabilitation of individuals with SMDD.

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Expected results:

- RSSC is ready for graduates. The graduate documentation is completed, the classrooms for classes and rehabilitation activities are equipped, specialist working with SMDD category of individuals are hired.
- Graduates and their parents meet other members of the team and specialists in the day care department for individuals with disabilities, familiarize themselves with the schedule of RSSC and the day care department for individuals with disabilities, its regulations, and rules of conduct, etc.
- The short-term plan for the integration of graduates is made and approved by the Head of the RSSC.
- The short-term plan is tested and successfully implemented.
- RSSC creates the most favorable conditions for the social and environmental adaptation of the RSSC graduates.
- Rehabilitation work with a graduate in the RSSC is carried out in accordance with an individual working plan annually discussed and approved by the RSSC together with parents.
- The graduates are compensated and supported in accordance with the obligations of law.
- The range of services and the content of work meet the needs of the family and a young person with disabilities.

Indicators for the achievement of the expected results:

- All CCER&R graduates are enrolled in RSSC at their place of residence.
- In the local community, a tolerant attitude towards individuals with disabilities is established; there are no facts for their rejection.
- Favorable conditions for the social adaptation and integration of individuals with SMDD in society are created.
- Social contacts of individuals with SMDD are expanded, their employment and participation in public life improve their quality of life.

The problem of continuity of CCER&R graduates' transition to the RSSC is resolved through cooperation processes between experts from the two departments – education and social protection. In this regard, thematic interdepartmental seminars are held. The RSSC actively participates in the transition process of graduates. Experts attend all CCER&R events to meet future graduates and see their working conditions, prepare facilities taking into account the characteristics of young people with disabilities and consider different types of work activities taking into account the abilities of SMDD children. In the RSSC, a trusting and friendly atmosphere is created to provide psychological comfort to children with SMDD. Through early preparatory work, graduates' parents reduce their concerns about the future of their children (Lemekh, Shinkarenko, Skivitskaya, & Zabelich, 2020).

Conducting interdisciplinary scientific research

In these studies, such concepts as 'social education', 'individualization of learning', 'pedagogy of experiences', 'pedagogy of motivation', 'situational learning paradigm' will be defined.

Commentary. Each definition requires an independent consideration. For example, the 'individualization of learning' can be regarded on the basis of an existential approach that recognizes the uniqueness of each person. This approach determines the importance of taking into account the individual characteristics of each student, his/her feelings, health, and social experience (Abul'khanova, 2009). The 'pedagogy of motivation' can be considered through the need for care, the need for development, the need for communication, and the need for relationships (Maslow, 2013). In the context of proposed research, it is necessary to empirically determine the potential abilities of children and adults with developmental disorders (Berben, Sereika & Engberg, 2012; Lemekh, 2021). Thus, various diagnostic materials can be developed, such as a Scale for Assessing Communication Level Development, a Scale for Assessing Independence Level Development, which will help to determine the potential capabilities of children and adults with psychophysical developmental disorders (Göthe, Messer, Gent, & Kliegl, 2012; Gathercole & Pickering, 2001).

Development of multi-module variable educational plans and training programs

It is also necessary to develop multi-module variable educational plans and training programs for RSSC day care services, which content is linked to CCRE&R curriculum and training programs which goals and objectives are characterized by continuity.

Commentary. Such an educational plan can differentiate training content and act as a mechanism for the implementation of multi-level training content for individuals with SMDD, which in turn will enable us to get as close as possible to the implementation of an individual educational path for each student and to choose educational subjects that will contribute to self-disclosure of each student, the development and improvement of his/her potential skills. The modular structure makes it possible to meet the changing educational needs of students with SMDD (Lisovskaya, 2019). The content of educational subjects is aimed to develop life skills to the maximum (Gopnik & Meltzoff, 1997).

The inclusion of educational subjects on deontological issues in the educational plans and training programs for training, retraining, and advanced training of personnel

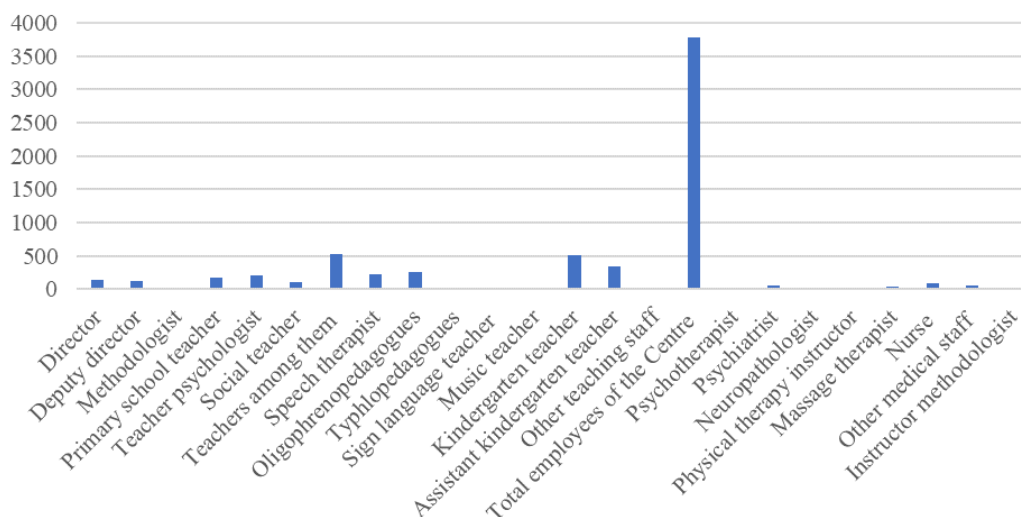
Deontology is a professional ethics that promotes the formation of a system of views and beliefs that recognizes the possibility of learning despite the severity of the existing developmental disorders, and does not focus on difficulties or problems, but on developmental abilities.

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Commentary. A humanistic approach to teaching individuals with SMDD presupposes that the direction of student social development is more important than the development of their cognitive abilities, suggests a structure of education where the priority is to preserve student health, taking into account the characteristics of their communication, understanding and behavior, which ultimately ensures the formation of a viable personality (Ayres, 2018; Robitaille, 2010).

Figure 2 shows the range of experts working with students with SMDD in an interdisciplinary team of experts. It includes teachers, methodologists, general education teachers, social educators, speech pathologists (speech therapists, oligophrenopedagogues, sign language teachers, typhlopedagogues), educational psychologists who provide personalized correctional support and participate in the correctional and developmental education of individuals with SMDD. Medical support for the education of this group of students is provided by medical experts (neurologist, psychiatrist, psychotherapist and therapist, nurses, physical therapy instructor, massage therapist and other medical specialists).

Figure 2
Interdisciplinary expert team



Such a number of experts in various fields is determined by the wide range of health and developmental disorders of children with SMDD. Therefore, the ability to work in a team and adhere to ethical rules of interaction are particularly important.

Preparing individuals with SMDD for future professional activities and independent assisted housing

Commentary. The formation of a viable personality requires a certain level of work ability. And work ability, in turn, is determined by a number of factors, including the state of health, the existing interests of the individual and the presence of external support (Rozov, 2016). This determines the importance and prospects of the organization of vocational training for individuals with SMDD on the basis of vocational training organizations, professional and social rehabilitation centres. Such vocational training gives individuals with SMDD the opportunity to master certain types of work or individual activities, to acquire work-related skills, to master these skills, and to support these categories of citizens through accompanied employment or employment in the open labor market, and thus to integrate into society.

The solution to the problem of creating safe workplaces for individuals with CMDD

Safe workplaces require workplace assistance, reduced working hours, additional breaks and timely psychological and medical assistance. This social support would enable this group to increase their self-sufficiency and independence, to provide for themselves financially at least partially and to live independently, not in a boarding school.

Commentary. Employment organization for individuals with SMDD offers them the opportunity to participate in socially useful work, to feel their importance and their independence, thanks to their compensation. In addition, work activities extend the social relationships, give individuals of this category the opportunity to communicate with others, and ensure the acquisition of social skills.

Conclusion

Each identified strategic direction may include several tactical steps or tasks that help to achieve positive decisions in a particular strategic direction, including (a) a meaningful disclosure of each structural component of the Concept of Continuing Education for individuals with SMDD and the expected steps for its adoption; (b) the presentation of a possible sample of the interdepartmental cooperation program for the implementation of the Concept of Continuing Education in the SMDD rehabilitation system; (c) the compilation of a list of scientific research topics aimed at solving the problem of Continuing education in the SMDD rehabilitation system; (d) and the development of a modular variable educational plan for the day care departments of Regional Social Services Centres for individuals with SMDD over the age of 18 years.

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Author Contribution

Lisovskaya Tat'yana Viktorovna contributed to the research concept and methodology, organized the study, and analyzed the literary sources.

Skuratovskaya Marina Leonidovna worked with sources, edited the text of the manuscript, approved the final version of the manuscript.

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Conflict of Interest Information

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.