

International Workshop

**Impact of Poverty and Social Exclusion on Children's Lives
and their Well-being**

8th – 9th September 2008 (til noon), Bratislava, Slovakia

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Abstract

Child Disability and Social Exclusion in Russia and Post-Soviet Countries

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My contribution to the workshop will explore the links between child disability and social exclusion in Russia and CIS countries. It will be based on my doctoral research concerning the effect of social policy on the well-being and daily lives of disabled people in Russia. I have recently completed a year's qualitative fieldwork in central Russia, including biographical interviews with young people with physical disabilities and visits to facilities for disabled children. My research findings are thus both recent and relate to a region of the world where concerns about child well-being are very pertinent. In addition to talking about my own research, I would be happy to discuss papers that look at other aspects of disability or else deprivation and marginalisation in Central and Eastern Europe.

Disability is strongly associated with poverty and social exclusion in the post-Soviet world. Major infrastructural obstacles to the well-being and independent living of disabled people are exacerbated by a lack of political will and voice. My presentation will focus on two major issues facing disabled children in the region – poverty in families and educational exclusion. Finances are a concern because the meagre benefits paid to disabled children and their families do little to offset the financial burdens associated with care. Education is a key dimension of exclusion for disabled children in Russia, who are taught separately from their able-bodied counterparts in a continuation of Soviet practices of 'defectology.' This isolation creates further segregation and exclusion in a wide of arenas, for example higher education, employment and societal participation.

By way of conclusion, I will reflect on how the Russian experience fits with that in other CIS countries. Although academic and policy elites in these countries do deploy the discourse of social inclusion, disabled people are still far from integrated into society. The wide range of problems facing disabled children can only be solved by pragmatic solutions, for example creating local support groups, encouraging links between various schools and working to promote a rights-based approach in social policy.

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