Antonio SANDU

Social Work Techniques

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Antonio SANDU

SOCIAL WORK TECHNIQUES

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FOREWORD

The present volume intends an incursion into some key techniques of social work practice. Using arguments of social epistemology, the author introduces an overview of the case work and brings to attention important aspects of social work counseling. The reader is challenged to explore methodological aspects of counseling and is encouraged to practice the use of NLP techniques during the nondirective interview, which is able to lead to a change focused on the strengths of the client. Putting into relation the main occupations used in assistance-work creates the complex context of inter and multidisciplinary approach of social work practice, recognizing the border aspect of the discipline. The whole approach proposed by the author is filtered by the ethical character of social intervention directed towards the promotion of individual rights and having as central concept the quality of life. This is not viewed as an abstract concept, but as a source of operational indicators relevant to individual existence. To validate social work as applied science, the author brings into focus epistemological arguments adapted to the requirements and demands of this field. Review of various theories in social work is used just to emphasize the complexity of the social approach and practice. Changing client's situation is approached from the perspective of needs-resources relationship and represents a successful attempt to combine the two perspectives. The author predicts different relationships that can be made at the level of client's needs and of personal, organizational and community resources. Keeping the line drawn by the case work, the author explores different models of counseling in social work. Seen as a technique and not a purpose in itself, counseling is regarded as a specific form of intervention able to introduce a change through the client's involvement and changing his

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reference frame. The types of counseling offered by the author managed to capture different intervention models, dependent on different theories of intervention. Focusing on the problem and keeping the focus on the "deficiency paradigm" introduces the classic counseling model presentation that begins with awareness by the client of the existence of the problem and its dimensions, going through successive phases such as exploration of strategies to resolve the problem, choosing strategy, implementing the decision and evaluation of results. To counteract this paradigm, the author presents applications of Neuro Linguistic Programming in counseling, managing to highlight "the perspective of strengths". With the guidelines from NLP assertions, the author supports the readers through examples of this new guidelines, each time bringing strong arguments of this type of counseling. It is remarkable how these processes of NLP are infused in the counseling technique in social work, representing an opportunity for practitioners to experiment and develop this direction. We can notice the author's initiative to achieve this synthesis for the reader in Romania, where the bibliography in NLP is fairly low. To complete the practicality of the approach, the author proposes a set of instruments used in social work; even their simple overview is an advantage for social work practitioners who can build significant guiding marks generating social practice. In the last part of the paper, the author switches from individual intervention to the collective or group intervention by approaching social programs so useful in the practice of social work, showing the main phases of such a design programs. Instead of conclusion, we consider that the authorial intent can meet the needs of practitioners in the field of social work and can be a useful reading for opening new approaches to intervention and social change.

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SOCIAL WORK AS A FACTOR IN ENSURING THE FUNCTIONALITY OF SOCIAL SYSTEMS

Man was created as a social being, and he must always relate to the social environment in which he must carry out daily activities, he needs to adapt actions, (social) behaviors to those considered normal at a certain time and type of society. The existence of normal, social relations determines the existence and functionality of society. Social relationships last as long as the partners exercise their duties, their functions within those relationships. In their absence, chaos and decay would install. E. Durkheim (1995) defines social relationship as "a system of normal, mutual interaction between partners based on certain links, attitudes, interests, being actually the content of social life".

Henri H. Stahl states: "disciplines that study society directly on site are: social anthropology, ethnography, ethnology, folklore, linguistics, political economy, legal sciences, politology, ethics, culturology, administrative and organizational sciences etc., along with border disciplines that study simultaneously physical and social aspects of human life: social biological anthropogeography, social psychology. All have in common: research of human life in the middle of nature and among its peers" (Stahl, Matei, 1962).

For a society to be functional, it must be able to ensure a balance between the needs and capacities of its members, on one hand and social environment requirements on the other hand. The malfunction condition of the social system is defined by the existence of deficiencies in the operation of a particular subsystem component of that social system.

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Restoring social functionality is achieved through well-defined action of social bodies, such as: family, church, school, institutions of civil and criminal law etc. Each of these institutions have specific roles and means of action, and we can say that through the effective collaboration between them, it succeeds to achieve faster and more reliable removals of failures that occur at a given time in the relation individual-social environment.

We can define social work as the activity (social action) which aims to help social systems or subsystems in dysfunction (either individuals, groups, communities) in order to meet appropriate social requirements and eliminate difficulties arising in their relations with the environment. Beneficiaries of such social services aim to reach and make full use of their skills and availability to achieve personal well-being, life satisfaction, and to be able to contribute to the good functioning of society.

The term of social work is defined by E. Zamfir (2000: 234) in two ways:

1. as an integral part of social services which aims to restore and develop the capacity of individuals, families, communities, to understand the nature of problems encountered, to identify constructive solutions and develop personal and collective capacities. It is, therefore, a specific type of social therapy. Social work services take two forms:

a. in the natural living environment;

b. in social work institutions.

2. Social work designates the non-contributory social benefits system (provided to people in need, depending on the dimension of this need: social support, child benefits, scholarships, compensation, gratuities, subsidies).

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The system of social work services and the non-contributory social benefits system form the global system of social work.

The traditional beneficiaries of social work are:

- Poor families;
- Families unable to obtain a home;
- Institutionalized, abandoned children or children in dysfunctional families;
- Juvenile delinquents;
- Socially unintegrated young people;
- Dependent persons;
- Abused persons;
- Persons with disabilities;
- Persons suffering from social diseases;
- Old age persons;
- Discriminated persons;
- Persons in distress.

Functions of social work services

- Develop own capacities of clients in achieving self-sufficiency and ability to solve life problems through their own efforts and solutions (Wirth, 2009);
- Professional support based on knowledge and specific techniques;
- Facilitate the absorption of social support and make the connection between clients and resources;
- Focus and effectiveness of social support;
- Protection of the interests and rights of people in need or in difficulty.

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Marginalization and exclusion

Socialization process, in terms of society, has as main objective the transmission of cultural norms and values of a society to all members that compose it. The ultimate goal of these processes is to establish an order of coexistence of individuals in that community and its continuance in time.

Society should be seen as an open system whose inputs and outputs operate like cultural filters. Socialization should be seen as a complex process of social learning of behavioral patterns and interpretation grids of socially mediated reality as cultural paradigms, building the individual's superego. Acting throughout the individual's life and having a distinct form from one stage to another of personality development, the socialization process assigns to the individual a set of roles and statuses preparing him for the correct interpretation of the roles that he has to play, giving him social personality.

Through its order of magnitude, global society can not be a unitary system. The society is divided into communities, and these in turn are divided into social groups. Through enculturation individuals internalize norms and values of the group to which they belong (affiliation group) as well as of the group they hope to join (reference group).

At the level of society, courts are established in order to determine the degree of internalization of norms and values that are specific to society by its members. Instances of social control check the degree of conformity of actions of social actors to group norms and the degree of internalisation of these values. The exercise of social control is done by institutional or informal means, material or symbolic means, through reward or coercion. Social control is the result of mutual

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interdependencies between the components of a social system. Deviant behaviors (which deviate from social conformity) are sanctioned by courts conducting social control through a form of marginalization, accompanied by the phenomenon of labeling and even exclusion (Neculau, Ferreol, 1996).

The interaction between the individual (social actor) and society is achieved in two ways. The social action that the actor realizes, receives feedback from society through social control (Hurubean, 2006). Conformity or deviant behavior stands for a series of subjective psychological factors of the individual (temperament, aspirations, personality factors) as well as social factors (belonging to a group that has a deviant subculture, the rigor of social control, the type of solidarity in that society) being a resultant of the interaction of these factors. Deviance occurs in two aspects: a positive one, of transformation and social change and a negative one, leading to delinquency.

In order to maintain the functionality of the overall social system, courts operating social control tend to eliminate subsystems in dysfunction. Elimination is achieved through their marginalization and in some cases even through their exclusion. The phenomenon of marginalization and exclusion of deviants, whether individuals or groups, can be beneficial to society, both by eliminating possible sources of social danger as well as by the example provided (Bulgaru, 2003).

However, once created, a marginal subculture starts to work according to its own laws, socializing its members in accordance with its own norms and values and imposing its own social control. Between society and marginal groups, the phenomena of mutual rejection will appear (Sewpaul, 2006). However, the phenomenon of social marginalization and exclusion does not occur only to deviant groups (Ponea, 2009). The society extends the so-called “social control” on other

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social categories, which enter among the rejected. For example, lets consider the case of persons who suffer from AIDS. Although this is not a deviant category itself, even though some individuals may come from deviant backgrounds or manifest deviant behavior, there is a general tendency to marginalize them, under the excuse either of the fear of possible contamination or repulsion towards the "sexual habits" of the patient etc., resulting into their avoidance (Ponea, 2009).

Continuing to analyze various social dysfunctions that may occur, we also find in most cases the presence of marginalization or exclusion phenomenon. This phenomenon occurs in response to "otherness". "The other", whether delinquent, dependent or unable to meet certain needs, is seen as a threat to the system's balance that must be eliminated, a force that could destabilize the existing order. This perception of the "other" comes from intuition of the need to change and the individual's unconscious fear that he will have to undergo a change. The perception of "otherness" as a threat draws the adaptive reaction of its complete rejection.

Starting from "primitive" forms of magical-religious nature of exclusion (taboo) to those specific to contemporary society (blocking access to information), the phenomenon manifests itself as suppression of communication between the two social systems (worlds), blocking (usually mutual) the access to resources. Marginalization is correlated with another social phenomenon, labeling. The affirmation of deviant character of an act, and through contamination of the person who commits it, draws, according to Thomas's theorem (a situation is real through the consequences of defining it as real), (symbolic) sanction (Bădescu, 2006).

Social control is performed on the basis of the individual's conformity to what is expected of him. Once labeling occurres, the nature

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of the action that the individual achieves is no longer taken into account, but the consequences of what he is expected to do, in accordance with the existing label. A person with mild mental deficiency, once labeled as "mentally handicapped", will be made unable to access certain resources that are necessary (a appropriate education, for example), not always due to their absence, but as a result of exclusion. In other words, marginalization, as a result of social control, is performed on any individual who does not comply with social norms prevailing in that community and who does not adhere to its values. Good social functioning of the individual is such a value of all forms of society, especially the traditional type.

A person in social need, whether physical or psychological disability, dependent, unemployed etc., can not comply precisely with this norm of good social functionality due to the nature of things. Social control conducted on it, does not highlight the impossibility to meet the norm, but is satisfied with the notification of deviation. The effect of emergence that occurs in this situation is that, realizing social exclusion or marginalization of the individual unable to comply with the norm, social control itself appears as an institution in dysfunction (Harrison, Dye, 2005). Social work appears from this perspective as an institution designed to remedy dysfunctions of the social system by increasing social functioning of individuals composing it. Therefore, marginalized groups are composed not only of deviants in the classical sense (people who voluntarily refuse acceptance of norms and values of society) but also of those who are socially perceived as "different", including here all categories of dysfunctional persons.

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Antonio Sandu has a Ph.D in Philosophy. Author's contributions in the field aims to develop an appreciative ethic of care, derived from the appreciative constructionist perspective and a new semiotic methodology, called fractal constructionism. The author also develops a model of applied philosophy, called Appreciative Philosophical Counseling.

The present volume intends an incursion into some key techniques of social work practice. Using an argument of social epistemology, the author introduces an overview of the case work and brings into attention important aspects of social work counselling. The reader is challenged to explore methodological aspects of counselling and is encouraged to practice the use of NLP techniques during the nondirective interview, which is able to lead a change focused on the strengths of the client. Putting into relation the main occupations used in assistance-work creates the complex context of inter and multidisciplinary approach of social work practice, recognizing the border aspect of the discipline. The whole approach of social work practice, proposed by the author is filtered by the ethical character of social intervention directed towards the promotion of individual rights and having as central concept the quality of life. This is not viewed as an abstract concept, but as a source of operational indicators relevant to individual existence. To validate social work as applied science, the author brings into focus epistemological arguments adapted to the requirements and demans of this field.

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