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PERSONALIZED COMMUNICATION AND INSIGHT INTO SOCIAL CARE SERVICES

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Abstract

The social upheavals of the early third millennium include also the social policies within the European Union. The current problems faced by national economies have generated unemployment, inflation and even increased poverty. These negative effects were amplified by the wave of migration from the Arab countries. Under these circumstances, it is absolutely necessary to develop the system of social care, both in terms of quantity and quality. The diversification and improvement of social care services involve a, materially, consolidated infrastructure, but, at the same time, require improving the ways of interaction in achieving these services. Generally, assisted persons are vulnerable persons, fact which leads to the need for an appropriate work methodology. The status, needs and aspirations of persons in distress, at a certain time, are modified; acquiring or regaining normalcy involves increased efforts from social agents who assist such persons, but also from the assisted persons. Hence the urgent need to study how to better streamline the interactions within social care services. We believe that the problem of communication in social care services requires particular attention, as it holds a fundamental place in the management of these services. The analysis of the behavioural sets and the need to tailor communication to specific situations require efforts that are to be made by teams composed as well of specialists in counselling and therapy. The study aims to investigate and identify the most effective ways of communication in order to eliminate difficulties arising from the partially compatible communication with the concrete situations.

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1. Introduction

Social changes and cultural interactions within globalization phenomenon (Peters & Besley, 2016) have effects in the communication sciences and practices as well. Today we observe a discrepancy between the dynamics of society and the evolution of communication. Therefore, communication structures can no longer fully satisfy the needs of the social reality although the reality itself accelerates the shifts and causes changes in the structures that no longer correspond to the new social necessities. Moreover, it widens our horizons of knowledge and facilitates our contacts. Communication is becoming more and more comprehensive and less territorial. Nevertheless, we cannot help noticing the fact that the very theory of communication has significantly enriched, at least in terms of the conceptual apparatus, in the last twenty years. Thus, numerous disciplines include in their object of study the communication problems with the obvious purpose of capturing the complexity of the current phenomena (Miège, 2008).

The functionalities of states and national economies imply gestures of solidarity for a normal functioning of the society. The economic factors influence to a considerable extent the social security policy of a state, as it aims the aspects regarding the wealth of the citizen. Currently, we are not talking about vulnerable groups, but about vulnerable populations. We must bear in mind the fact that Europe is facing a significant migration of the dominant Syrian population (Bauder, 2016). At the same time, Europe's prolonged economic crisis (Cesaroni, Sentuti, & Buratti, 2015) leads us towards the welfare state. In its evolution, the society may also record setbacks. A setback that we believe we can record is that in the Romanian society of the last decades we are dealing with a huge increase of illiteracy and, obviously, of the number of socially assisted (Opie, 2015). That is why, the last decades have seen a rapid evolution of the social care services. We notice that the effectiveness of the social care services in Romania and in Europe depends, to an unexpected extent, on communication, but also on the communication techniques (Nica, 2015b). Specifically, the dynamics of the social reality requires the construction of an efficient communication. The large number of socially assisted is due to the prolonged economic crisis in Europe as well as to the changes in the east of the continent, but also to the existing conflicts in the area of the Arab countries that have determined the phenomenon of refugees in European countries (Lucas, 2016). In this situation, language is a barrier in the communication process. That is why, a period of adjustment in which is learned, first of all, the language of the country of adoption is necessary. Gradually, the communicational, functional and cultural integration is achieved (Chen, 2015).

2. Problem Statement

The methodology of approaching certain cases of social assistance requires substantial changes regarding the interaction within this process. However, specialists' efforts were directed towards classifications categorizations, etc. of some situations, as well as standardizations of some action schemes. Thus, adaptation to specific situations has been only partially achieved and the negative effects have appeared immediately. Many resources have been inefficiently used. That is why, we believe, pattern communication must be doubled by a personalized communication. Case management makes the difference between the standard customer of such service and the person at some point in trouble, which needs a treatment adapted to his specific needs. Communication adapted to the socially assisted person

can cover giant steps, in a short time, on the road of reintegrating a person in the normal climate of a society (Popescu, 2015a).

We believe that in social care services as well communication must enter a new stage in which to overcome the routine of standardized interviews, questionnaires. We argue that discussions on this issue, at the level of experts, will improve the means of communication. We use the expression *personalized communication* in the sense of adapting the language to the level of education, emotional state, needs etc. of the assisted. The present study aims to bring into attention the critical role of communication in assisting the vulnerable persons, namely the need to adapt communication to the coordinates of the concrete situations. We start from the assumption that the escalation of communication and its conformation to the specific situation of the vulnerable person lead to viable results in a shorter time.

2.1. The necessity of personalized communication in social care services

We notice that, although complex, diverse and advanced, the methodologies and research methods in social care face a serious limit, that of approaching the ideatic built man and not the real, concrete, unique in its kind man.

The social worker must use an accessible language and adapt to customer's communication style. Thus, a therapeutic relationship can be established. It is important that the recipient of the social care services communicates as much as possible. We mention that from the first visual contact with the assisted we are provided with information about him. The behaviour, the interrelationship, the writing (where applicable) also provide us important information about the recipient of the social care services. This information is less censored.

From the many analysed cases, some of them discussed and published, it is very clear that the science of communication should be more studied and used in the activities with the socially assisted. Often, poor communication leads to wastage of other resources. A scientifically made communication leads to the rational and efficient usage of other human and material resources. We believe that material support should be made rationally, temporarily, depending on the situation. In other words, we should not confine ourselves only to the material support as this, we believe, is just an unnecessary waste (Fast, O'Brien, & Block, 2017). Each such effort must be accompanied by the signal of what is expected of that person. It is important to ensure that the assisted person has correctly understood the message of helping. For example, the child must understand that he also has responsibilities (age specific) in his turn (to learn, to carry out small house chores). For this reasons, the nursing and childcare staff should discuss these issues with them at all times and initiate various games and competitions designed to accustom them with tasks specific to their age. The adult with labour capacities must understand the fact that the material support is intended to temporarily take him out of the impasse. Engaging in search of a job and attending retraining courses lead to the status of being an independent and integrated into society person. We believe that dependency on an aid system, which is a convenient alternative to a potential reintegration, is a disaster for a social assistance system. This is why, counselling sessions (meaningful communication) play a crucial role in avoiding such situations. The continuous flow of social assistance and social solidarity activities must constantly achieve the reintegration into the normal social life (Lazaroiu, 2015a). Supervision is aimed at avoiding such situations; it was conceived as a monitor in order to avoid

inefficient actions. With particular acuity, supervision verifies the issues, the persons and the resources mobilized within the social assistance process. Its results are the reduction of the failure rate in this area.

The social media phenomenon is present also in the field of social assistance. The various experiences in the field are communicated in online specialty magazines. Events such as conferences, congresses on specialized issues are announced in the virtual environment (the date of the event, conditions of participation, schedule, outstanding results, etc.). In the social media can be viewed the social assistance centres, the services they provide, news, surveys regarding the services, legislation, reviews, contests, etc. Social media provides information for beneficiaries, but especially for their families, as well as for the professionals (Nica, 2015a).

2.2. Psychological aspects of interaction in social care services.

Social care services can address the problems at the individual level. This is why, the role of psychologists is very important because the repeated imbalances of the disadvantaged persons have as a clear effect marginalization and, especially, self-marginalization. Interaction with these individuals supposed important psychological aspects. They impose a careful analysis. The intervention team must have in its composition a psychologist who specializes in problems of disadvantaged people. We notice that the social worker's responsibilities in terms of communication with the assisted change, but also within the team he works in.

Psychological aspects of communication must not be neglected. The social worker must bear in mind the fact that the beneficiary of social services needs a comfortable and secure environment in order to communicate relatively easy, to avoid potential bottlenecks in communication and in order to seek support in solving his problems. When we talk about personalized communication we bear in mind also the conversation during which the specialist plays rather the role of the moderator, meaning that he only intervenes to keep the speech of the assisted person on the addressed issue or on the aspects directly related to the respective problem. The social worker acquires communication skills during his professional training in order to cope with complex situations. However, it cannot solve the delicate situations, such as psychic traumas. The intervention of the psychologist specializing in such matters is useful and necessary (Rehberg, 2015). Is exactly why, the work in this area is a team work, a full and complex team, we say.

Communication in social assistance situations has complex issues that we must consider. On the one hand, we must ensure that we understand correctly and completely the real situation of the assisted, through a set of relevant questions, addressed during several meetings, through repeated conversations, by studying the non-verbal behaviour, through discussions with the close associates of the social assisted person etc. On the other hand, it is important to make sure that within the interaction with the assisted our message is correctly perceived, that we were able to embark him on the road to reintegration. The complete identification of the assisted problems and the configuration of viable solutions require a coherent action team that intervenes in a useful time and a thoughtful period of time, spending some resources profitably. It is essential to make sure that the social worker correctly perceives the message of the assisted and the assisted perceives (correctly, in his turn), on the one hand, his situation, and on the other hand, the intention of the assistant of helping him to socially reintegrate. If the first aspect does not

raise problems, meaning that the specialist is likely to know in depth the situation the assisted is facing, the second aspect raises each time problems (sometimes even insurmountable). The vulnerable person is facing a complex of problems (material, of health, of education, caused by repeated traumas, etc.) that mentally blocks him and determines him to isolate himself (Friedman, 2015).

We consider it absolutely necessary for the psychologist to intervene and identify methods by which the assisted discovers in himself the forces (unsuspected by him) that can help him integrate into normality (Nica and Potcovaru, 2015). The awareness of own problems is a turning point in the socio-cultural reintegration process of marginalized people.

Within the therapeutic relationship appropriate solutions to reduce or even eliminate (where possible) the problem of the assisted are identified. The description given by the assisted helps building the image about his problems. For the social worker it is important to help the assisted recognize and correctly self-evaluate his problem. It's very important to be created the necessary climate so as the assisted to think positively and to make self-knowledge efforts in order to discover his personal capacities. The specialist is interested in identifying the resources that might activate them in solving the problem they face. But the attempts do not always lead to success. The assistant should be prepared with a therapeutic alternative to the problem. In a deeper stage of the therapeutic relationship, the person is assisted to assume responsibility for the existing situation (there where this is possible). The assisted may be made to reflect on his own behaviour in order to identify resources (we refer to attitudes, motivation, volition, decision, etc.) consistent with an acceptable behaviour by the peers and the society (Buzducea, 2005).

All are part of a personalized intervention in which the assisted is determined to participate in decision making, (we notice) leading to his own change. Thereby, through a highly adapted communication, the assisted is accompanied in completing the steps of reintegration into a normal social life. Awareness of own problems, discovering of own resources and identifying external resources, setting up viable solutions for the dissolution of the assisted problems require a highly adapted language and effective communication. We support this thing because reintegration into norms and values accepted by the society is the central purpose of social care services (Cojocaru, 2005). During each crossed stage, the beneficiary discusses with the whole team prepared for the intervention. This exercise, we believe, contributes to significant changes in the assisted language.

Palliative care of the terminally ill patients involves a high degree of psychological therapy and spiritual counselling, depending on the religious denomination. And here, communication is indispensable to an improvement in the emotional state of the person, because panic, sadness, anxiety include their entire existence. Most psychologists therapists do not indicate the fact that cancer patients, in an early stage, express (in an overwhelming proportion) the desire to know the exact diagnosis, arguing that they want to manage certain aspects of the personal and even professional life. Improvement of life quality is the main purpose of the social assisting (Popescu, 2015b).

3. Research Questions

We wonder what is the role of communication in the social services management.

We wonder which is the consistency of a conversation with an illiterate person, which is socially assisted.

At the same time, we wonder what is the customized intervention of a social assistance team.

4. Purpose of the Study

For a good communication, the recipient of the social care services should receive assurance that he is supported, accepted and understood. The bridge created between the assistant and the beneficiary consolidates as the therapeutic relationship progresses. That is why, communication must be put at the centre of the methods for managing the social assistance issues. But its dynamics should not be overestimated, nor neglected. We state that the fundamental dimensions of the experience in this area may change under the conditions of an increased focus on personalized communication. We have every reason to believe that the approach of identifying viable solutions in particular cases of social assistance will shorten as duration and will be much more efficient (Reveley, 2015). At the same time, social care services do not function isolated; they are open systems, which are in a permanent exchange of information with other systems of the society (Choi and Yu, 2015). The epistemological reorientation task in this area goes beyond the possibilities of investigation of a limited number of specialists. Therefore, it is necessary to move beyond the criticisable problems (Lăzăroiu, 2015b). Working in widened teams, which adopt justified and logically argued methods, is absolutely necessary. We mention that the urgent need does not mean precipitation (Miège, 2008), but implies devising some progressive stages of configuring some improved ways of communicational interaction in social assistance systems. Identifying the most effective ways of communicational interaction is the purpose of the present research. It is bear in mind, on the one hand, increasing the effectiveness of communication with the assisted persons and, on the other hand, it is considered the identification of interaction methods within the social intervention collective.

5. Research Methods

The research was conducted over a period of six months (during April-September 2016) of systematic observation and analysis of the communicational interaction within the activities undertaken by The Good Samaritan Foundation. The Foundation has in its assistance institutionalized adolescents over the age of 18. A number of twelve boys have entered in a social integration program. The evaluation of the interventions in these six months shows an increased efficiency compared to the same period of the previous year. We notice that the intervention of a specialized psychologist has beneficial effects on the behaviour of the assisted, as well as on the communication with the professional staff. Another method used in this study is the interview based on a questionnaire applied to both the assisted and the staff of the Foundation. We have studied the behavioural changes of the assisted as a result of the therapy sessions with the psychologist, of intensifying communication inside, but also outside the centre. We observed that increasing communication with each one has led to the shortening of the integration period and acquiring of the independent person status with a job and a desire to start a family. At the same time, the field work performed within the project *Mobile Centre for Social Inclusion*, funded under the POSDRU multi-regional project "Investing in People", Priority Axis 6 – Promoting social inclusion, Key Area of

Intervention 6.2 – Improving the access of vulnerable groups in the labour market, conducted during the period 2007-2013, it allowed me to scientifically systematize information and formulate the problems faced by the post-December social assistance system.

6. Findings

We notice that the red wire of the social care activity is the communication in its various forms. In cases of failure, the apologies do not improve things, but emphasize, first of all, the inability to find the way to efficiently communicate with the beneficiary of the social care services. In the work of social worker, one often comes out of the predictable area and ends up in front of some new situations. But professionalism and, above all, the desire to succeed lead to exploring new approaches to complicated situations. We ascertain that human-human communication interaction is more difficult, more delicate and more complicated than the human-machine communicational interaction (Popescu, 2015c).

Communication with the illiterate individuals is exclusively verbal and the interpretation of the expressions used by such persons is extremely important. Images can be of great help in working with illiterate persons. The language of the people in extreme poverty, subjected to repeated traumas, illiterate, is extremely poor; the number of words used is small and such persons communicate very little. Persons who have suffered severe traumas experience a severe depersonalization and they defectively integrate socially and culturally. This is why they present different symptoms such as pessimism, crying, emotional pain or disgust, discomfort, dissatisfaction, shame (indicators of a severe depression). Most often, such persons have a limited time perspective and are experiencing states of silence, indifference, inaction. Their participation in the social life is extremely low, they are negativist and indifferent. Low communication with peers leads these people to self-isolation, to demotivation, but also to decreased tolerance and they are fatalist. Most times, their family and personal relationships are defective. Not infrequently, people with such problems are socially isolated, fact that leads to self-isolation. The distancing from peers and society comes from outside the person (generated by peer's behaviour, as a rejection reaction of the person who does not fall within normality, is even deviant), but also from within him (caused by the consequences of the psychic traumas). In dysfunctional families, children have to suffer because they lack education and their health is poor (as a consequence of the continuous material deprivation). Typically, girls practice prostitute from an early age, and boys are violent and become criminals long before coming of age. Quite often, they drink alcohol and become drug addicts (Prowle & Harradine, 2015). Rejected by family and friends, such individuals lose their group affiliation; they find emotional support and are accepted by those who are in similar situations. Thereby, they adhere to stigmatized minorities. Reinsertion into normal life forms supposed a long time of sustained support from specialists.

We notice that human interrelationships and the behaviour have the value of communication. The social worker must have communication skills (formed and perfected during personal development sessions) and must not hesitate to consult with colleagues when he encounters difficulties in coping with assisted. The team involved in managing a case can identify alternatives to the solution chosen by the social worker. Communication within the work team is also extremely important, because the methodology and methods of intervention must be designed separately for each case. Debates,

controversies, dialogues are needed to identify them. Only the sum of the contributions of the team members can lead to the success of that intervention. Quite often, social workers and psychologists are forced to modify, during the intervention, the methods applied. We notice that the social worker is the interface between the assisted and the social assistance team. The social worker is the person invested with confidence by the assisted, but along with his fellow psychologists, physicians, educators, choose the most appropriate solutions for the respective case. The intervention must be customized and take into account several aspects. Thus, listening represents as well an important aspect of the interrelation; it is about the active listening, which also has its techniques that may stimulate the assisted explanations. Here, the non-verbal language of the assistant goes in the foreground (it is about nodding as a sign of approval or confirmation of the fact that you understand and listen with interest to what you are told, attentive silence etc.). The danger of confusion can be removed by a correct interpretation. Integration into a normal social life means adapting to the norms and values accepted by the society.

7.   Conclusion

We believe that we cannot rely on intervention recipes in the field of social work. Each case has its peculiarities that we should consider in order to manage successfully, to the end, the process of the assisted reintegration into society. The revision of the interaction and modes of communication within social work teams lead to shortening the time of reintegration into a normal social life of vulnerable people. In other words, it is necessary to reconsider the functions of communication in the interactions within the system that deal with the reintegration of the temporarily or permanently assisted people. An efficient communication facilitates the therapeutic and counselling efforts, determines a consistent involvement of the assisted in the approach to solve his problems and it comes even to a reconsideration of his values and principles. We consider the interrelation ability of the social worker to be essential in the process of assisting. We insist that the message conveyed by the social worker should not be general and abstract, but should be simple, specific, i.e. adapted to specific aspects of the assisted situation (aspects related to education level, age, health, emotional state, etc.). Communication, in these working areas, should be analysed with great acuity in order to avoid dysfunctions, duplications, confusions, etc. It is necessary that from the contents of communications specialized tests to be carried out that would reveal us realities, but also needs of the beneficiaries of social care services.

A coherent system of programs, measures, support activities is required, all the more so as the contemporary society is experiencing the magnitude of some such phenomena. We believe that the main message of assisting must be: *we help you to acquire the ability to help yourself and help (if possible) others in your turn.* The feeling of solidarity must be developed in our peers (Friedman & Jo Lewis, 2015).

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