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**REALITIES AND PERSPECTIVES IN THE EVOLUTION OF THE
SOCIAL ASSISTANT**

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Abstract

This paper aims to identify some problems that have occurred in the practical field regarding the career development of the social assistant profession. We will try to surpass the profits of the profession in recent times, but also the barriers that persist or appeared as novelty elements. The actuality of the activities carried out in the field of social assistance is due to the increased number of registered beneficiaries, both from the perspective of those who receive the state and social services indemnities. This is where we can distinguish the acute need of specialists in the field, across the different levels of the national social assistance system. As a result, starting with 2004, the profession of social worker became regulated, with the adoption of the number 466 law on the status of this activity. At the same time, good practices in this field must be based on certain principles of professional deontology so that this instrument became reality when the profile code was adopted in 2008. The attestation of the professional competences obtained for the admission to a higher professional level is established by the professional body in the field, namely the National Council of Social Assistance in Romania. Last but not least, the activities carried out through the accredited providers of continuous training for the social assistant profession are emphasized. Legislative changes require that social assistants continue to be informed about this.

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1. Introduction

The training of the social worker generates in practice a series of profiles, which do nothing else but to highlight different facets of professional quality standards.

One of the classical roles of the social worker is the counsellor. The support given by the social assistant to the person in difficulty is a common image of the specialist in the field (Brearley, 1995). Another common occurrence for the social assistant is that of the case manager. In this situation, he has administrative, evaluation, monitoring and coordination responsibilities (Raiff & Shore, 1993). Less well-used but with an impact on the client is also the position of trainer of the social worker. Behavioral modelling determined by the professional skills of the social worker has a decisive impact on the "release" of the beneficiary.

Limiting the degree of dependence on a certain type of compensation or even suppressing it as a result of changing the client's situation is often the result obtained by the support provided by the social assistant. Thus, information, knowledge and attitudinal changes in the life of the beneficiaries express this role as a social-educator assistant (Barker, 2003).

Assessing the position of the social assistant at the societal level, we can say that it is the main receiver of the need for change in the social policy of the state. It will become the promoter of social programs and strategies so that the quality of life is as high as possible. The terminology used in these cases is that of "social policy planner" (Rocha, 2007).

Finally, we also mention the new advocacy status that the social worker can take for his client. Supporting customer interests can be done in front of various institutions, communities, groups or individuals (Schneider & Lester, 2000).

In particular, the achievement of these goals depends on how the initial training of the social assistants has been carried out, especially the one that continues.

2. Problem Statement

2.1. Initial training and continuous training of the social assistant in Romania

The regulation of the profession of social assistant requires as a condition of access the graduation of the candidate of a specialized specialization, in an accredited higher education unit, and subsequently the preservation of the status is conditioned by his participation in continuous training courses.

Some of the latter are carried out through non-profit private providers accredited by the professional body in the field, and others are managed by higher education institutions in the framework of professional master programs or / and in postgraduate programs, credited with professional points. For example, at the University of Pitesti, at the level of 2014-2015 (National Council of Social Workers in Romania, 2018), such continuous training courses for social workers from the counties of Arges and Prahova.

At the same time, completing the license studies can be done by the social workers through a dedicated professional master - Social work counselling. The structure of any of these forms of professional development includes modules or courses specific to the analysis of the legislation in question. Also in the case of social work, we have to deal with the normative distinction between the general framework law: Law 292/2011 and the specialized legislation, the subsequent, namely, that regulates the different types of benefits and social services (Dobre, 2011). The combination of the theoretical aspect of the necessary

knowledge in the field of social assistance is made harmoniously and with the practical part of the specific problem.

Students participate directly in charity activities, volunteer in specialized organizations. The main issue addressed by non-governmental organizations is that addressed to the protection of children in difficulty. In one of the forms of co-opting the students to the practice, it was agreed to conclude a mentoring program by the social assistance study program at the University of Pitesti, with an international partner, namely Habitat for Humanity - the Pitesti branch. One of the residential centers at that time, subordinated to the Arges General Assistance Directorate, was chosen to be the subject of a support program provided by the organization.

Although the main purpose of the company was to limit the incidence of homelessness and to ensure a minimal level of comfort of the home, the action was entirely different: socialization, empathisation and support by a mentor student to an institutionalized child. Such an approach at the same time involved the mastery of the main social assistance techniques applied by the practitioner who joined the group at the general meetings between the mentors and the children included in the project.

3. Research Questions

3.1. Does the concurrence of the social worker's continuous training with those competencies necessary for the practitioner in the labor market?

We believe that applied social assistance requires first of all the deepening of legal knowledge and the adoption of legislative news. This necessity is determined by the fact that constantly the problems in society require the review of the public policies in the social field and implicitly the rapid change of the norms. The complexity of the social benefits typology as well as the extension and diversification of social services require permanent notification of the social worker to the incidents of the monitored case. Granting an allowance involves checking the eligibility conditions, while the social services to which the client is entitled have to be made available to him by the care manager. It must embrace a systemic approach, considering integrated services that are becoming a concrete reality and not just a declarative level.

At the same time, the social assistant must take into account the acquisition of those competencies necessary to occupy the various professional levels. Until 2008, although the profession of social worker was recognized and regulated by the adoption of Law 466/2004 which referred to its status, it could not have an effective recognition even among practitioners in the system. As long as there is no professional body in place, able to implement the principles of the statute, the reaction of the communities was unpredictable.

Thus, until the moment when the lack of transparency in accessing the various hierarchical stages in the profession has ceased in 2011, anyone in the mayor's specialized apparatus could be delegated with social assistance powers. The emergence of the National Council of Social Workers in Romania (CNASR) took place in 2005, but until its cataloging as a representative team - made by the law no.117 / 2008 regarding the qualification of some professions, the impact was not expected (Law 117,2008).

With the accession of Romania to the European Union, it was necessary to adopt the basic principles for the recognition of professional qualifications. "Unfortunately, the practical implementation of this principle is hampered by the national requirements for access to certain professions in the host country. In

order to overcome these problems, the European Union has developed a system for the recognition of professional qualifications"(Popovici, 2009, p.448).

At the same time, in December 2007 (published in 2008) the decision of the Council (CNASR) was adopted by which the professional ethics code was adopted. This last normative act establishes in Annex 2 the professional steps, thus concretizing the provisions of art.25 of the statute of the profession. The status of the profession states in the article quoted in the previous one that "the social assistants have to carry out their activity only in the area of professional competence determined by the qualification and professional experience.", But it was omitted the materialization of the specific competence levels of a certain qualification / experience at the same time, there were no criteria according to which a certain classification could be made in this respect. At the same time, the provision of the following paragraph establishes the social worker's obligation to participate in continuous training: "The social assistants have the obligation to constantly improve their professional knowledge and skills and to apply them in practice. Social workers contribute to improving and developing the knowledge base of the profession. "

The Code of Ethics states the four professional steps in the career of the social worker, namely: debutant, practitioner, assistant and principal. This provision was not sufficient to delimit these professional competences, so that by the Decision no.8 / 2011 of the National Social Workers' College there were also defined the criteria according to which the social assistant can fit into the respective hierarchical stages: "A) less than 12 months seniority in the studies necessary for practicing the profession of social assistant and seniority in the field - first stage of professional competence b) at least 1 year seniority in the studies necessary for practicing the social worker profession and at least 1 year of practical experience in the field - practitioner professional level (c) at least 3 years of seniority in the field of studies necessary for the exercise of the social assistant profession and at least 3 years of professional experience in the field - professional competence degree d) at least 5 years of seniority in the field - the specialty of the studies necessary for the exercise of the profession of social assistant and minimum 5 years of practical experience in the field - professional competence: main assistant."

This new philosophy of public policy within the profession of social assistant is an integral part of a set of measures to be implemented at the level of Romania, following the European Union's Lisbon strategy. This is mainly aimed at developing cooperation for professional training. One of the tools for the application of this ideology is long-term learning so as to achieve a high level of personal development, an increase in the competitiveness of jobs (Prisecaru, 2004).

Another issue to be discussed is the exercise of the profession in a liberal form, in the private environment, within a cabinet or a professional social welfare society. The regulation does not distinguish between the terminology used between the social worker covered by a labor contract at a public authority at the county level (General Direction for Child Protection and Social Assistance) or at a local level (social assistance department) and the social worker is organized in a private form and contracts the work it carries out with a social service provider. However, the attestation of free practice is the essential condition that is necessary in order to establish one of the forms of exercising the profession in a liberal way.

The certificate of free practice requires activity in the effective field, which has been carried on continuously for 5 years from the moment of issuing the license in the field and at the same time a term of 5 years from the date of enrollment of that person in the national register of social workers.

Thus, the activity carried out in the private environment is considered to be an excellent one, only possible after having acquired the highest professional degree in the public sector.

4. Purpose of the Study

Identifying limits on the continuous training of the social assistant and formulating proposals accordingly

5. Research Methods

The study will use the method of analyzing social documents and the interpretation of statistical data from a relevant temporary interval. In this respect, the evolution of the legal provisions regulating the standards of the social assistant profession, namely the decisions of the CNASR or the provisions of the special laws - which contain substantive changes, will be taken into account. They will be extracted from the databases contained in the National Register of Social Workers, ie the Register of Continuing Education Providers, interesting data according to criteria such as: number of social workers practitioners, forms of exercising the profession of social assistant or the number of organizations involved in the training continue in the profession. The analyzed range will cover the period 2008-2017, especially 2015-2017, as the expansion of the profession in the private sector then took place. Correlations of the statistical data from the targeted periods will be made by observing changes occurring at the regulatory level in the same time horizon.

6. Findings

"The training of social assistants is part of the specific vocational training and other liberal professions, being realized through providers of professional training at university and post-university level in the field of social assistance, as well as through specialized providers, established on the nonprofit principle, endorsed by the College, under the terms of the law" (Sălăjeanu, 2010, p.77). The relevance of the professional skills that the social worker acquires in his / her training is important later in the practical work. "Competence (the formal authority) expresses the limits within which the holder of a post has the right to act in order to achieve the individual objectives and assigned tasks" (Cojocaru & Cojocaru, 2010, p.865).

If formal authority is important because it is established by normative acts and decisions of the head of the institution, in the case of professional authority, this is descriptive by the good practice guide and assessed in concrete terms by the meritocracy confirmed by the hierarchical chief appreciation and at the same time by the team from which is part of it. Today, the discussion may be based on the statement that "it is time to redefine the mission and forms of social assistance and vocational education to become relevant in the new globalizing conditions" (Lyons, Manion & Carlsen, 2006, p.204).

The standards of social services offered must comply with the European recommendations - the European quality framework for social services. It will preserve the decentralization of social services, their adaptation to the needs identified in the communities, the development of a broader spectrum of services and, last but not least, the creation of a realistic financing system based on the correct use of the available resources - to the state budget and to the local budgets (Buttu, 2012).

The reality, however, highlights the disadvantages of bureaucracy in the national social assistance system. "The fulfillment of the needs of the system, materialized in the completion of forms, business cards, standard forms can be time-consuming, so that the direct relationship with the child and the failure becomes very low, the contact with them being replaced by the elaboration of the reports and the forms. ...] The need to do everything according to imposed work cadres inhibits the professionals to use their own analytical capacity and judgment or even the common sense" (Zanca,2010, p.107).

The satisfaction of the social assistant determined by the fulfillment of the tasks takes place only from the perspective of covering the birocratic formularism, which gives it a sense of security. However, this formal job success will considerably diminish from the actual work carried out with the beneficiary so that the informal side will be minimized, if not abandoned in certain situations (Burton, 1997). Practice has generated a normality reaction in this respect, for example in the field of adoption, where in 2016 the law was modified and the half-dosed forms were reduced by elimination or merging, reaching a number of 12 - and so big (Law no.243 / 2008 modified in 2016).

In other news, one of the benefits that social welfare has gained lately is through global communication, the possibilities for professional interaction between social-welfare communities, wireless, databases, PDAs, videoconferencing, etc. (Buzducea, 2009).

From a statistical point of view, according to the register of providers of continuous training in social assistance, there were 40 accredited entities, of which only 24 are currently performing such activities at present. What is relevant is that for some time there were also 3 universities involved in the continuous training process, in postgraduate courses credited by the professional forum. In the meantime, the expansion made by private organizations in providing continuous training to the social worker has led higher education institutions to abandon this type of activity. The risk of overlapping postgraduate courses of continuing training with master professional programs is another reason for the disappearance of faculty from the ranks of trainers authorized by CNASR.

The continuous training of social assistants will be based on the initiation and further development by the National Social Assistance College of Romania of a training institute, namely the National Institute of Social Assistance. The selection of lecturers will be more assured by those who are now involved in the activity of accredited NGOs as continuous training providers and why not from the profiles of the academic staff.

The opening of the profession to liberal social assistance was initially considered to be the cause of failure. If for the first time this way of exercising the profession of social assistant has developed shy, with only 20 cabinets and professional companies in 2010, lately the expansion was considerable.

In the year 2015 there were 74 individual cabinets and 8 professional companies, and in the year 2017 there were a number of 82 cabinets and 9 societies (CNASR decision no.118 / 2015 regarding the approval of the national register of social workers). The fact that only 2 professional companies and 12 individual cabinets had their suspended activity in 2015, respectively 2 professional companies and 14 cabinets in 2017, denotes the fact that social assistance as a liberal profession is a certainty.

However, it should be noted that this expansion of the profession in the private environment was registered in parallel with the increase of the number of social assistants enrolled in the national part I (the public sector). If in 2015 there were 5,297 social assistants covering the 4 professional stages (CNASR decision no.118 / 2015 regarding the publication of the national register of social workers), in 2017 their

number reached not less than 7433 (CNASR Decision No. 164 / 2017 regarding the publication of the national register of social assistants). This also points to the tendency to diversify the range of social services provided by the national social welfare system along with the shift to integrated services. Although the number of social assistants is steadily increasing as a result of enrollment in the professional body, the organizations dedicated to the formation of conscience have not remained the same as they did at first. Some of them did not ask for reappraisal, some of the active ones are at the first accreditation, so only 6 entities have achieved a second rebate from the start of 2012.

The diversification of social services devoted to different types of beneficiaries led to the acute need for overspecialization in some areas. The disappearance of universities from the ranks of the providers of continuous training is a minus in this perspective, as the theoretical part would have been much better presented and assimilated by the learners.

Equalizing master's programs in the field with a certain number of professional points in the continuous training of the social worker could be a viable alternative until the National Social Assistance Institute is operational.

Adopting a guide to good practice in social care at CNASR level, to be processed in the forms of professional training, is a necessity. The phision of our social assistance system still has certain limits: it is kept from the reminders of the past - for example, there is still a measure of the placement of minors in residential centers, totally inconsistent with the principles adopted in other states of the European Communities that only accept family-type homes - much closer to the proximity and affection of a family; bureaucracy prevents the beneficiary from accessing the appropriate services at a timely basis, so that the expected effect may no longer occur; the absence or limitation of the exchange of experience with social assistants in the European area impinges on "loans" in other states. Therefore, Romania's accession to the EU-specific organizational structures requires unification of practice in the field.

The profoundly applied nature of the social assistant profession requires certain skills that should have already been acquired, including by the assistant at the beginning. Imposing as a condition of access to a profession a certificate of volunteering for a period of minimum 1 year in a non-profit organization in the social field could be a beginning. Access to the profession is currently conditioned solely by graduate education, without verifying in any way how the debutant is qualified to interact with the beneficiaries.

7. Conclusion

The standardization of social services according to the European model has generated an undeniable gain for social assistance in Romania. The transfer of some private bodies in providing the necessary support to the social assistant profession in terms of continuous training facilitated the adaptation of the social assistants to the European Union good practices.

The continuous training of social workers to an institute organized under the authority of the professional body-CNASR will constitute a new chapter through which the Romanian national system harmonises with the European one. The magnitude of the services provided by the social workers organized in private regime confirms the high level of the offered quality, the alternative to the public system having lately a real success in Romania.

The overwhelming importance of the application plan in the work done by the social assistant presupposes a permanent correlation of the factual reality with the principles and procedures stated in the special legislation. The legislative adjustments will have to be initiated by the professional body as a result of the territorial notifications addressed by the practitioners in the field.

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