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SOCIAL WORKERS RELATION WITH POLISH SYSTEM OF SOCIAL AID

Sociological analysis of collective identity
and institutional power

AFFILIATION



INTRODUCTION

Relation between social workers and the system in which they provide social aid is a complex social phenomena. Because of both historical and modern day tension, polish social workers often struggle to fully thrive in their enviroments, finding themselves in a difficult role of mediators between the victims of exclusion and the system that excluded them. Thus, it is critical for social workers to examine and reflect on their position within the system in order to both improve their ability of providing social aid and also to make sure that they receive adequate apreaciation for their work.

METHODOLOGY

- Firstly, a total of 18 short, explorative interviews with social workers was conducted, regarding their own definition of social work and their perception IFSW's definition
- Secondly, I conducted group interviews with the staff of 6 welfare centers and 2 expert interviews with chairmen of polish social workers trade unions
- Lastly, I conducted observation of a collective dispute between the workers of a welfare center and the government,

Bibliography

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OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH POSITIONALITY

The research was conducted from an engaged researcher's perspective, in collaboration with Polish Union Federation of Social Workers. Thus, besides answering research questions, the research was also conducted in a manner that aimed to empower and activize its participants, in a way that would hopefully lead to the improvement of polish social worker's working condtions.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

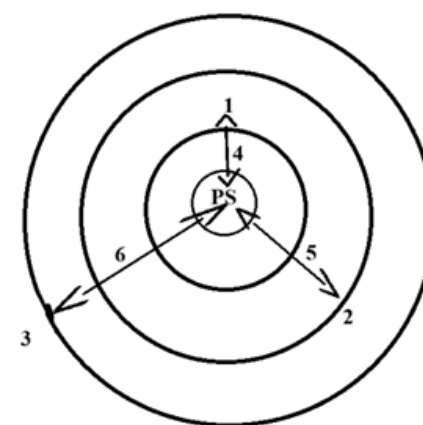
1. What is the role of undersrtanding in the relations that social workers form with their clients?
2. How do institutional requierements affect the practice of social work?
3. What are the characteristics of social workers' postion within the system of normative reproduction?
4. What are the characteristics of collective identity formed by social workers?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

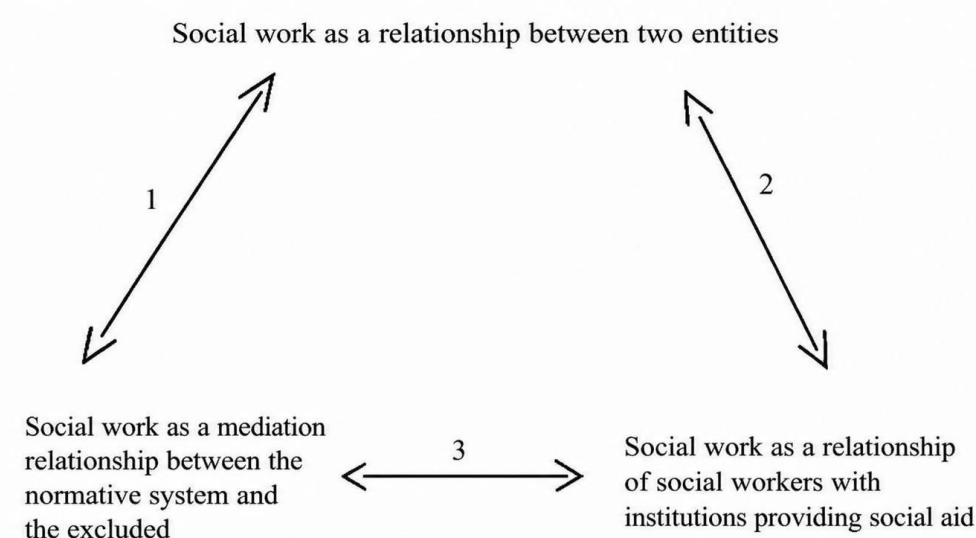
Based on social theory mentioned below and 18 preliminary interviews I decided to conceptualize social work as a relation, divided into 3 interconnected levels:

- a) Relation between social worker and their clients (Merlau-Ponty's phenomenology, Rosa's resonance theory)
- b) Relation between social workers and an institution, which supervises them, eg. individual welfare centers (Also Rosa, Granosik)
- c)Relation between the collective identity of social workers and the larger systems of normative reproduction (Bourdieu and Waquant, Heimann)

These 3 levels of structural conditions would further influence any collective identity and actions that social workers could undertake as a group (Castells and Touraine).



PS - Social worker's as subject with agency
1 - Social work (SW) as relation between social worker and their clients
2 - SW as relation between social workers and an institution
3 - SW as relation between social workers and the larger systems of normative reproduction
Connections:
4 - Understanding built both on academic and life knowledge
5 - Governance of social work
6 - Power during practice pedagogical work, social postion



- 1 - Authority and pedagogical action on one side, and on the other side resonant and understanding attitudes that may make execution of potential sanctions difficult
- 2 - Influence of requirements that form relationships with clients, and on the other side the matching of strict procedures with direct contact with the client
- 3 - Influence of institution-given norms and their reproduction during social work, shaping systems of normative management and social work procedures (e.g., right to social assistance, organizational culture)

SOME OF THE FINDINGS

1. Knowledge in social work is constantly being modified and constructed by the ongoing merger of informations, coming from both academia, contacts with clients and social workers life experience.
2. Postion of social workers as part of the governing body combined with social workers employing their "life knowledge" during practice translated to social work fitting the definition of pedagogical action, thus participating in social reproduction.
3. Institutions exploit (sometimes openly) social worker's innate need of providing aid to the excluded to not treat them adequately in terms of workers' rights
4. The dominating form of collective identity seemed to be the. indentity of resistance, with the respondents feeling repressed and stigmatised. Interestingly, their presumed idea of how social workers are perceived seemed to differ significantly, towards the negative side, from representative data.
5. Habitat of social workers seemed to discourage any attempts of labour struggles, although some individuals have managed to break free from that, which was another intersting phenomena.
6. The above context led to respondents being reluctant of starting any collective disputes, instead wanting to focus on improving profession's PR - an attitude one expert refered to as "servility".