

New Tendencies in the Education of Social Workers in Poland

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The new social and political situation in Poland, which started in 1989, can be defined as a transition from the welfare and wealth state model towards the community model. The following processes are connected to those changes: decentralization of the state, citizens' representation in different social structures controlling the business matters of different groups, consolidation of mediating structures (non-governmental associations and organizations as well as local and neighbourly communities deal with the problem of care as a part of such responsibilities as self-help and self-organization) [1].

Out of the welfare state criticism, a new concept of social policy and social work based on providing help and social solidarity appears [2]. Changing society and new problems (unemployment, poverty, dysfunctional families, etc.) require new solutions and new qualifications, including those of social workers. Changes in the educational system are also necessary. The graduates must be prepared in such a way as to be able to adapt to changeable situations, they should be creative and able to build up their knowledge on their own, they will not stick to the routine methods of work.

The education of social workers in Poland has a long tradition in Poland. It was initiated by Helena Radlińska (1879–1954) — the founder of social pedagogy in Poland. According to L. Malinowski, necessity of the education of social workers was mentioned in the literature at the beginning of the XX century. It was also mentioned in literature from later period and also in the law on social welfare declared in 1923 and in the post-war legislation [3].

The law on social welfare unambiguously determines what qualifications a social worker should have. It is also confirmed by its amendment from 1996. According to this Act, you can be a social worker only if you have a social worker diploma or if you finished University studies (on the licentiate or Master of Arts degree level). A wide range of possibilities of receiving social workers' education on different levels and in different forms tries to satisfy the needs of society. It is also very important considering the fact that Poland is trying to join the countries of the European Union.

New principles of social policy and social work stem from the policy promoting family-life which means that it is focused on helping the family, which is considered a basic social unit. This is a new policy based on respecting human rights, appreciating the value of family and aiming at ensuring the autonomy and self-dependence of families. This is why, as the proxy of the government for family matters says, the policy promoting family-life should develop and effective social policy towards dysfunctional families and those which are in difficulties should consist in intervening and complementing [4].

The effectiveness of help provided to a family depends on how quick the intervention was, which should take place at the initial stage of the crisis. As K. O'Hagan claims, the need for crisis intervention has never been bigger than nowadays [5]. To the list of well-known crisis situations, such as improper treatment of children, elder people, people suffering from incurable diseases, mentally ill people, beaten women, teenagers having trouble with parents, etc., cases of crisis situations connected to sexual molestation of children, proliferation of Aids, rising frequency of disasters can be added.

To be able to cope with the above-mentioned situations, social workers must be highly qualified professionals. And this means, as K. O'Hagan writes, that a social worker should have the right ethical and theoretical knowledge making it possible for them to adapt and introduce peace and order as a remedy for chaos and dangers that crisis situations entail, they should

know how they react in crisis situations and also they should know principles, techniques and skills needed to take action [6].

According to A.W. Nocunia and J. Szmagałski, a social worker can help their clients acting as an adviser, mediator and as a spokesman for their business matters [7]. The aim of consultation in social work is activity whose main target is making it possible for the client to try and solve their problem by themselves. Mediating tasks in social work are understood as mediation in solving conflicts in which the clients are involved. The social worker is to be a mediator capable of solving problems and being able to run negotiations whose aim is to enable the cooperation between those who are involved in a conflict. However, being a spokesperson in social work consists in doing work for the good of the client (an individual or a group) or a specific category of clients who are in need of help that can't be provided to them by other institutions. As opposed to mediation, as the above quoted authors write, being a spokesperson is not a neutral activity [8]. Social worker acts on behalf of his client who does not have as much influence as institutions and other social forces whose decisions influence the satisfaction of his needs.

New research fields (sociology, pedagogy, social policy and others), connected to the changes of social policy and political system in Poland and also their consequences, such as unemployment, poverty, homelessness, set new tendencies in the education of social workers at Universities. They should be competent and being competent of doing various tasks necessary in social work (diagnosis, intervention, help, support). There are 32 skills listed on the Polish collective list of skills needed in social work [9]. Those are such skills as: giving advice, using elements of psychotherapy, forming a social diagnosis, communication skills, understanding the situation of a person or family, the ability to suggest help of competent institutions, the ability to win the help of people, families, local institutions, non-governmental organizations, the ability to make decisions and quick social intervention, the ability to use theoretical knowledge in practice and also the ability to use technical inventions in professional work.

As H. Radlińska noted once — this should be a profession whose aim would be supporting, activating and compensating unfulfilled needs, should be understood as service to other people [10]. Besides competence and high qualifications and skills, personal qualities are equally important. Such perception of social workers' skills is a result of the assumption that social work is a professional activity providing people with help in improving or regaining their capabilities of satisfactory functioning in social life. The aim of social work which is perceived in such a way suits its legal definition in our country as professional activity directed at helping people and families with consolidating or regaining capabilities to function and creating conditions which make this possible [11].

The education of social workers in Poland in the last ten years was based on the concept stemming from the need for professional practice and a real lack of social workers especially in small towns and in villages. The actual social and educational needs have decided and are still deciding about the kind of knowledge being acquired during studies [12]. This is why it is the subject matter and the form prepared according to practical needs that decide about the kind and nature of social work studies.

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