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**THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES  
UPON SOCIAL WORK  
DISCOURSE IN ROMANIA**



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## INTRODUCTION

In its dynamic evolution of supporting people in crisis, social work showed that it started as a charity of religious moral values and it has evolved to an institutionalized field, indispensable for post-industrial/postmodern society.

**Topicality:** In the early stage of our approach, interesting and worrying was the finding that in the impressive English and French bibliography sources, there were no concerns for a semiotic analysis of the field language. Language and discourse analysis in social sciences has become increasingly popular over the past thirty years. Only very recently has it been applied to the study of social work, due to the fact that communication and language is central to social work practice. (Hall, C., 2006 p.3).

Local literature of social work began its development along with professional renaissance in Romania after 1990. The field literature is heavily influenced by the American literature and, thus, we implicitly assist at the problem stated in the previous sentence.

Globally, in the past decade, the research of specialists in social work began to be influenced by applying the axioms of the school from Palo Alto, the ethno methodology, Goffman's micro sociology, and the models of semiotics. Also, in recent years, the

professional language analysis of social work experienced a modest, but encouraging activity, by English authors: Martin Bloom, Katherine Wood, Adrienne Chambon, C. Hall, S. Slembrouck, St. Sarang, J. K Whittaker, and Karen Heal.

**The motivation** behind this book was the acute lack of analysis of the local and even international social work language. Not less important was the field reality that demonstrated differences between specific formal reports of social work, in different areas of the country. These differences have influenced the local literature and relevant national legislation.

Interpersonal communication is organized in ways specific to social work, but the efficiency of communication is affected by an important number of blocks, also determined by a professional language laden with ambiguity. The results of such ambiguities are tested by the analysis of the social work discourse, used in the literature, as well as in the relevant legislation, and in the language used by the community of professionals (Goian, 2008, 2010).

Thus, we tried, through a semantic analysis of the field language, to present the usefulness of this research for social work.

This book aims to present the concept of social work and to indicate the inconsistencies in the terminology in social work, also suggesting solutions to reduce ambiguities of language in social work. Through the studied bibliography, the author created an opportunity of a pertinent analysis of the professional

terminology of social work using the epistemological support of the literature in the field of social work.

**The paper's applied value.** The conducted and presented research can be used in drafting future dictionaries of social work (literature in Romania has not known an editorial appearance). We propose that the language ambiguities resulting from the research shall be presented to the professional and academic community in social work in order to reduce them.

The book is structured in three chapters, as follows:

**Chapter I** aims to define from different perspectives the eclectic field of social work, the objectives of social work and its clients. Definitions and classifications of Romanian and international literature are considered, legislation is analyzed and the position of professional organizations is offered. The chapter concludes with an overview of the field values.

**Chapter II** aims to present and analyze the diachronic development of social work language making a shift from the charity during antiquity and the Middle Ages to the modern and contemporary period.

**Chapter III.** This chapter aims to conduct a structural analysis of the professional language of social work, and of its terminologies. Perspectives of the field literature are discussed by presenting of language forms in the field and the types of inconsistencies found.

Given the nature of the topic, we specify that for the elements of language of social work, we will keep besides the

translation in English, the original Romanian version, which will be put in brackets.

This paper aims to present an analysis of specialized language useful for theorists and practitioners of the field.

## **1. SOCIAL WORK definitions, objectives**

### **1.1 General considerations**

Social work is socially constructed through interactions with clients (beneficiari) through its organizational and social context and the social forces that define it. Literature of social work recognizes that this relatively new area supports social change to increase the life quality of individuals, groups and communities.

The most important bibliographical sources in the field recognize that the social work profession requires special training through which professionals get the necessary skills to help people to regain their social functioning, train them how to interact with others in a group, learn about social services and institutions. Thus, it provides a basic formal knowledge, theoretical concepts, specific operating skills and core values that are used to provide safe and effective social services.

In this chapter we will make reference to the North American social work system which, through academic and empirical tradition, provides a model for the international community in the field. In the above mentioned system, before 1970, the social workers were named "caseworkers" (lucratori de caz), community organizers, workers in child protection etc.

It should be noted that this concept has been taken over in the local social work literature through a direct translation, as case work (*lucru pe caz*), then transformed in intervention (*interventie*), by the impulse given by the law of the past decade.

Casework was the main method used by social workers in interventions at individual or family level. Group work was also used as a method of social work (street gangs, hospitals, prisons). (Buzducea, 2005, p.27)

## **1.2 Social work definitions:**

There are many definitions that describe social work, definitions that have expanded the conceptual scope of the profession of social worker.

In our point of view, we believe that social work can be defined in many ways:

a. The first perspective is the dictionary definition, which, according to, in the Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language, is still one that sends to the beginnings of social work, by providing material aid. We are assisting in the psycho-social field, to insufficient knowledge of the status and roles of social workers. This restriction to material aid only creates confusion in multidisciplinary teams in which the social worker interacts for case solving with specialists from the fields of psychology, legal and medical sciences.



Assistance s.f. 1 ..) Social assistance = material support system of people who are not able to work and do not have the means to live; support, help (medical, material etc - From Fr. Assistance).

Assistant, assistants, up, adj., S.m. and f 1. Adj. Assisting, which is present. 2. S.m. and f person assisting someone, who is at hand to give help. Of fr. assistant, lat. assistens,-NTIS, germ Assistant.

Social, social,-e, adj. 1. Created by the society, which is related to the lives of people in society, their social relations or to society, regarding human society. Of fr. social lat. socialism.

*Tabel nr. 1.3. Insufficient definition of social work according to the Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language*

b. The second perspective is that of charity and includes a universal and precise definition, with brevity and simplicity, which, due to the lack of a bibliographic source, we can concentrate it in the following conceptualization:

- Social work helps individuals who cannot help themselves;

This definition was useful in training people who are not specialized in the field, to make them understand what social work is.

c. A third perspective concerns the elimination of the individual's dependence which can thus become functional "The social worker is that professional which assists those facing