

THE PROFESSION OF SOCIAL WORKER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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Abstract: The International Federation of Social Workers has declared that social assistance is a profession in the field of human rights. This article aims to present the profession of social worker by sociologists and professionals at national and international level. Through these contributions, it was possible to examine the compatibility of the principles and the implementation of the actions by social workers and professional organizations by adopting and observing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Keywords: The profession of social worker, human rights, social assistance, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Introduction

The “professional” in everyday speech has a wide range of uses, many of which are lacking in objectivity, sometimes being biased. The main schools of sociological theory have dealt with this subject and have come to the conclusion that some “professions” have “ideal type” values.

The main sociological theories have provided a basis for working on the professions. At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, functionalism was in the foreground, followed by the Marxian conceptions and those of action theory. In the twentieth century, ideas from Foucault and feminist theory entered the field of sociology.

Social assistance is of interest to sociologists because it is knowledge-based, so the consumer must trust the practitioner. Confidence can be

determined in various ways - recognized after a university education, by observing the codes of ethics and legislative regulations. It is important that practitioners have a discreet conduct regarding the work performed in compliance with the legislative and conduct rules. These characteristics of professional work have led theorists to focus on professions, some of them having positive opinions in this regard.

Wilson (1933) saw the professions as “one of those stable elements of society that inherit, preserve and transmit a tradition. . . . They generate lifestyles, habits of thought and standards of judgment that make them centers of resistance to outside forces that threaten their constant and peaceful evolution.”... (Carr-Saunders & Wilson, 1933: 497). Thus, for a long time the professions were given major importance, considered “promoters of the social order” (Lynn 1963: 653; Parsons 1968), a more moderate and prudent enthusiasm at present.

Professional principles of altruism and high ethical standards¹ have been regarded as aspects of the everyday world and, therefore, as somewhat imperfect social constructs, compared to the principles of a planned and regulated community.

Interactionism has given rise to a version of the “power” approach that soon came to dominate the sociology of the professions (Hall, 1983: 11). The autonomy of a profession depends on the state and, once a profession has acquired autonomy, it can establish a position of social prestige, with its own niche in the social stratification system. It can also develop an ideology and define social reality in its sphere of action.

According to Foucault’s view, the emergence of modern society saw both an epistemic shift from the “classical” to the “modern” form of knowledge, organized into “disciplines” (Foucault, 1977a), as well as a new capacity of the state of government. Sovereignty has changed from the art of maintaining power to the science that leads to the welfare of all (Foucault, 1979: 12). Experts in these new scientific disciplines have been crucial to this governance, and the emergence of independent professional bodies has contributed to the emergence of these modern forms of sovereignty.

The profession of social worker must define practical parameters and values based on knowledge, so that he/she can participate fully in

1 See Ioan-Gheorghe Rotaru, “Plea for Human Dignity”, *Scientia Moralitas. Human Dignity - A Contemporary Perspectives*, The Scientia Moralitas Research Institute, Beltsville, MD, United States of America, Volume 1, Year 2016, pp. 29-43.

international affairs (Envall, 2000: 4). The phenomenon of globalization has served as the backdrop of the initiative (Ellwood, 2001; Langmore, 1998; Midgley, 1993, 1997a, 2000b).

The International Council for Social Assistance declared that “social assistance has always been a profession for human rights” (IFSW, 1988). The profession of social worker is not considered a leader in the global human rights movement, the basic principle is the intrinsic value of every human being. Also, the main objectives are to promote equitable social structures that can provide people with security and development while maintaining their character (IFSW, 1988). Although many aspects of international treaties - including those dealing with peace issues, self-determination and freedom at the macro level - are set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as being interdependent and indivisible. However, world leaders - especially those in the West - have paid considerable attention to civil and political rights. Social assistance has been and is involved in all areas of human rights and the profession of social worker is interested in the economic, social, cultural rights and special populations.

Social assistance leaders and their contributions to human rights

At the beginning of the 20th century, the founders of the social assistance profession were involved in significant human rights movements. US-born Jane Addams is an undeniable example, as she pursued social reforms in all social fields defined later in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931. According to a short biography, “she was at the forefront of the struggle for women’s suffrage, immigrant education, health care, children’s rights, housing, peace and pro-aggressive education” (Schugurensky, 2005).

At the same time, Sophonisba Breckinridge, promoted “the maintenance of peace, the problems of international law, the political and civil rights of women and the promotion of social actions” (Branscombe, 1948: 440). Eglantyne Jebb from the UK as an early charity organizer became “a pioneer of children’s rights writing the first Declaration of the Rights of the Child in 1923, adopted by the League of Nations in 1924 as the Geneva Declaration” (Healy, 2008). Alice Salomon, the founder of social assistance education in Germany and first president of the

International Association of Social Assistance Schools, has promoted women's rights, advocating for peace and disarmament.

The impact of more recent leaders and professional social workers is more difficult to assess, because they have been present in most anti-apartheid movements and for the rights of disadvantaged people. Human rights movements are interdisciplinary. Therefore, the significant contributions of social workers cannot always be recognized as being related to the profession.

In most countries, social assistance efforts are focused on the protection of children, which has led to the establishment of government agencies and a series of special laws and services. Also, the gay rights movements are still under way. Here, social assistance has taken a bold stance, at least internationally, stating clearly in its ethics and policy statements that social workers support equal rights for all citizens, regardless of sexual orientation. At the local level, social workers have assumed the main role, although not all agree with the position of the profession.

Human rights social activities involve many directions of investigation. It also indicates the compatibility of the missions and values of the profession with human rights. The contribution, representation and involvement of social assistance leaders in human rights causes are inseparable. However, there are questions about what social assistance has done in the field of human rights and how those situations have been resolved by "professionals". The researches on these questions included specialized papers published in international conferences of social assistance, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the biographies of social assistance leaders.

The resemblance of the official declarations of the values of social assistance with human rights is indisputable. "Social assistance consists mainly in the fact that the value and dignity of the person is unequivocally recognized ... social assistance starts from the same basic assumption that each individual is self-independent, regardless of his or her material or social condition" (Gore, 1969: 57). The value and dignity of all people are recognized in the codes of ethics of the social work activity. As stated in the statement of international ethical principles, "Social assistance is based on respecting the value and dignity of all people and the rights that derive from it" (IFSW / IASSW, 2004: 41). According to the statements of the social assistance leaders and the codes of ethics of the social

assistance activity, we can declare that social assistance is a profession for human rights.

Reactions of social workers regarding the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

At the 1948 International Conference on Social Assistance, meeting in Atlantic City and New York, papers were presented on the UN Social Commission with recommendations from the Social Commission, the International Children's Emergency Fund (now UNICEF), the International Organization for Refugees and the World Health Organization. The term "rights" appears in the works only in a presentation of the schools of social assistance in Brazil, when the speaker said that anyone who is preparing to be a social worker must take into account the problems related to the nature of a human being, his needs, and "his rights and duties as a person" (Junqueira, 1948: 83). At the 1950 conference in Paris, Donald Howard quoted the UN Charter, starting with the phrase that the UN people "are determined to reaffirm their belief in the fundamental human rights, dignity and value of the human person; to promote social progress and the best standards of living and to use international mechanisms to promote the economic and social progress of all peoples" (Howard, 1950: 27). He also mentioned that Articles 22 and 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are particularly safe in terms of social welfare.

Article 22 provides that "Everyone, in his capacity as a member of the company, has the right to social security; it is entitled that through national effort and international cooperation, taking into account the organization and resources of each country, to obtain the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for its dignity and the free development of its personality" (UN, 1948). Article 25 extends to this aspect in areas important for social assistance: "Everyone has the right to a standard of living that ensures his and his family's health and well-being, including food, clothing, housing, medical care, as well as services. social needs; he has the right to insurance in the event of unemployment, sickness, invalidity, widowhood, old age or in other cases of loss of livelihood, following circumstances independent of his will; mother and child are entitled to special help and protection. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, enjoy the same social protection" (UN, 1948). It can

be said that the extended rights in the opinion of Billimoria in India are that “better human relations can only accumulate as a result of the universal implementation of the human rights charter. Let us gather all our resources, efforts and energy to transform ourselves into a world order based on the charter of human rights” (Billimoria, 1950: 266).

The 1952 and 1954 minutes show that the activity of the International Conference was segmented into working groups focused on areas of social services or specific populations (children and youth, services for families, persons with physical disabilities, etc.). These processes did not have a worldwide echo, with the exception of the 1968 International Conference of Social Assistants, with the theme “Social Assistance and Human Rights”, which took place in the International Year of Human Rights of the United Nations. Recent writings have largely ignored this significant conference.

The development of social assistance, in Romania, begins during the interwar period under the coordination of sociologists Dimitrie Gusti and Hanri Stahl. They develop rural sociology and social anthropology as well as urban sociology, a privileged field of social assistance such as poverty and its fight. In the conception of Professor Dimitrie Gusti, the progress in social thinking, is regarded as a general law of the human species which is equivalent to the transition from authority to autonomy.

Representation of social assistance from a professional point of view at international level

The publication of the first handbook on human rights and social assistance in the early 1990s by the United Nations, in collaboration with the International Federation of Social Workers and the International Association of Social Work Schools, was a major achievement. The handbook “Human rights and social assistance” states: “More than educators, social care practitioners are aware that their concerns are closely linked to respect for human rights. They accept the premise that human rights and fundamental freedoms are indivisible and that the full realization of civil and political rights is impossible without enjoying economic, social and cultural rights” (UN, 1994: 5).

At the same time, “human rights are inseparable from the theory, values and ethics of social assistance and practice ... Adapting these rights

must therefore be an integral part of social assistance work, even if in countries that live under authoritarian regimes, advocacy it can have serious consequences for professionals in the field of social assistance "(UN, 1994: 5). Also, in 2002, the International Federation of Social Workers issued a handbook on the rights of the child.

The international definition of social assistance includes the phrase: "The principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social assistance" (IFSW / IASSW, 2000). The 2004 ethics document mentions the definition and enumerates human rights treaties "particularly relevant to social assistance practices and actions" (IFSW / IASSW, 2004: 3). Following the commission formed by the International Federation of Social Workers, since 1988 social assistance cases have been resolved in Grenada, South Africa, Malaysia, Guatemala, Colombia, Israel, USA, Chile and many more. The Commission also issues statements to governments on other human rights violations.

This analysis focused on efforts at international level, so that National Organizations have their own record of human rights initiatives. For example, the National Association of Social Workers in the US, adopted the 1996 human rights policy statement, called "International Human Rights Policy" (NASW, 2003).

In many countries, social assistance has been significantly involved in the implementation of human rights treaties, in particular the Convention on the Rights of the Child. For example, in Jamaica, government and non-governmental efforts (NGOs), led by social workers, have promoted children's rights through policies to develop new social services and support for children in need.

Conclusions

Social assistance has been involved in human rights over time and can claim important areas of leadership, especially before the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Between 1940 and 1950, social assistance focused on "post-war relief and reconstruction and on efforts to spread education and training in social assistance in new areas (Kendall, 1978). Since the political declaration of the International Federation of Social Workers in 1988, the official involvement of the social worker profession in human rights has increased. Despite this fact, the external recognition of the contributions

to social assistance remains limited. The visibility of social workers in the global human rights movement could advance by creating global leadership for all organizations representing the social worker profession.

We can conclude that social workers pay more attention to human needs than human rights. The profession of social worker is involved and interested in international developments, but his focus is on initiating child protection programs within UNICEF and on social assistance programs extended in Europe and China. However, social assistance uses the word “need,” rather than “right,” so that people everywhere need organized programs and legislative regulations to ensure employment opportunities and a stable income, a safe home, an adequate mental and physical health.

Social assistance could be reformed so that the needs and rights identified by basic needs are no longer sometimes juxtaposed, but valorized and promoted as a profession of action. The mission and values of the social work profession are in a natural connection to human rights. Human rights offers the social worker profession, at international level, a clear direction, while ensuring local and national problems to connect with global concerns.

In the field of human rights, the social assistance profession can make significant contributions. First of all, social workers really understand the concept of indivisibility of rights. They note that in daily practice, it is not enough just to increase human well-being based on food, shelter and medical care. Also, having its dual commitment to cultural diversity and respect for the rights of individuals, social assistance can provide mediation in the conflicts between universalism and cultural relativism in human rights (Healy, 2007).

Finally, action-oriented is perhaps the largest social work force and can make important contributions to human rights. The social workers take measures, they are committed to ensuring human rights for individuals and communities. What is missing, perhaps, is the awareness of social assistance activities as a practice of human rights to influence the change of social policies. We hope that, through a review of professional organizations in the years to come, the profession of social worker will strengthen its commitments and achievements in the field of human rights.

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