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Dilemmas of research in social assistance - condition and perspectives

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ABSTRACT

The article emphasizes the importance of conducting research in the field of social welfare, social work, while presenting their condition, dilemmas and perspectives. The author of the article pays special attention to the lack of usefulness of the multiplicity of data that is collected within the social welfare system, and thus have nothing to do with the practice of social work, as a useful profession.

Keywords: social sciences, social work, social research, challenges in social work, perspectives of research, social assistance

1. INTRODUCTION

The notion of social assistance was established on Polish grounds only in 1990, thus replacing the notion of social welfare, which until today functions in some circles. When discussing the dilemmas of social welfare research, it is impossible to ignore its extensive organizational structure in which the above-mentioned research can be carried out, and the subject of research can be related to it. As a starting point, consider the concept of social welfare itself. Pursuant to the Act on Social Assistance of March 12, 2004, social assistance is: an institution of state social policy aimed at enabling individuals and families to overcome

difficult life situations that they are unable to overcome, using their own powers, resources and capabilities. [1] The purpose of social welfare is first of all to satisfy the basic life needs of people or entire families, thus enabling them to function in harmony with human dignity. All activities undertaken as part of the social welfare system ultimately lead to the independence of the individual, families who are in a difficult life situation. At the same time paying back attention to full integration with the environment. The scope of the offered activities, their form and size are closely related to the circumstances that justify granting specific assistance to the citizen. Actions should only include and only those needs of persons and families who are included in the possibilities of the social welfare system and are directed at its goals. [1]

One of the main challenges of the social welfare system is to undertake such activities that will effectively contribute to counteracting the marginalization of people and families, which undoubtedly requires the use of a number of changes, and thus conducting reliable, continuous scientific research that will allow to enter the system. Social assistance is more and more new solutions / forms of support, thus responding to the needs of the changing world and the increasingly visible change in the profile of the social welfare client. Increasing the professionalism of social workers, creating a system of cooperation between social welfare institutions and other entities operating in the field of human assistance, contributes to the creation of a new quality of services for people using social assistance and is possible only through scientific research. The use of research results in the practice of social assistance allows then to propose benefits that become more effective and helpful in overcoming a difficult life situation, thus leading to the creation of a modern help system. [2] Is the full potential of research carried out within the wider social welfare system fully exploited, whether the research carried out responds to the problems of contemporary social work, whether the practitioners of social work pay attention and are aware of the importance of conducting research in the field of their professional profession?

2. RESEARCH IN SOCIAL ASSISTANCE AS A FORM OF REFLECTION ON THE IMPLEMENTED ACTIVITIES

Research carried out within the framework of the social welfare system most often take the form of a social diagnosis, examining the local community, the purpose of which is to know the needs, expectations and problems related to a given issue. However, very often in national standards, it is not a study that is seen by this community, and the interested groups themselves, including those that are usually marginalized, do not take part in these studies. One can, therefore, be tempted to say that in very many cases these studies do not show the actual picture, and thus the social diagnosis becomes incomplete

However, a more serious mistake is when the document is not implemented in practice, it remains only another document for the so-called drawer. Research conducted as part of the social welfare system has been conducted for years, but for the most part for scientific use - assuming the character of the answer to the question: how is it ?, without focusing in most cases on answering the question, what should we do? How should you proceed? The most useful research in the field of social assistance, among others, those that address the following topics:

- diagnosis of social problems in a given commune or province (in particular, strategies for solving social problems);
- social assistance benefits (eg number and amount of benefits, assessment of the effects of work with family, environment, assessment of the effectiveness of the concluded social contracts);
- quality and standard of social services provided (eg services care specialist);
- implementation of projects and programs (eg evaluation of social and social projects, including projects financed from European Union funds);
- organizations and welfare institutions (eg. The analysis functioning of a social welfare center, social welfare home, other social assistance facilities in order to introduce organizational changes);
- the level of education of staff welfare (eg. Implementation training needs reported by employees, training evaluation);
- cooperation between the institutions at the level of social assistance local and intersectoral structures (eg working out rules for cooperation between OPS and non-governmental organizations or between OPS and schools and police, poviator labor offices). [3]

2. 1. Evaluation research as an opportunity for the development of Polish social assistance?

By directing an organizational unit of social assistance and carrying out a multitude of activities for the benefit of the local community, reflection often arises why the final effect of the implemented measure was completely different than originally assumed. A significant mistake within the social welfare system there is a situation in which we do not reflect, for example, before starting a large social project in your municipality, not knowing what activities should be implemented in it, throwing in many forms of support, which in practice do not change the location of charges, becoming unhelpful for them. The word evaluation at first glance sounds mysterious, but it can be a useful tool in the implementation of duties under the social assistance system. A properly conducted evaluation study can become a repository of knowledge, thanks to which we can improve the quality of activities for people who use the services of the assistance system. The very concept of evaluation appeared in Poland in the mid-1990s, and has been known in the world for about a hundred years. During this time, the understanding of this concept has evolved to the present day, when there are many ways to define it. Evaluation as a good study, for example in the education system, is also used in the social welfare system, although it seems to be much less.

A properly conducted evaluation study provides a lot of relevant information:

- whether the project, for example a social project is adequate to the needs of recipients / especially important when implementing projects that have the task of professional activation of people /
- whether the assumed results can be achieved at a lower cost,
- what are the effects of the project after a few years from the completion of activities
- of course, evaluation can serve different purposes - depending on what type of information you will be interested in, you can conduct an evaluation study in this way. In addition to the above-mentioned information that the evaluation can provide to you, you can gain knowledge about:

- managing a specific undertaking in order, for example, to improve its operation,
- making strategic decisions during the course of the undertaking, for example, discontinuation of specific activities, conducting activities in a different way, implementing new solutions [4],
- improving the quality and effectiveness of the undertaking, increasing the degree of satisfying the needs and expectations of its recipients - in this case the clients of the social assistance system,
- achieved goals and results of activities for clients.

Various projects can be the subject of evaluation on the grounds of social assistance: social projects, urban strategies, among others solving social problems, functioning of institutions in the commune, eg Social Welfare Center, Crisis Intervention Center and services provided by them for the benefit of the inhabitants of the commune in which they are located.

What is important is that the evaluation study can be carried out at all stages of your project before starting the activity:

- assessment of the project's adaptation to the diagnosed needs analysis of social, legal and economic conditions identification of potential difficulties during project implementation during the implementation of the activity: assessment and possible verification of the original assumptions
- showing the results that are measurable at a given stage of the project
- assessment of the project's quality after the end of the project:
- assessment of planned results and goals the opportunity to receive information on the sustainability of activities
- assessment of suitability and adequacy of activities

A well-conducted evaluation should have a participatory nature: participation of various stakeholders - identification of people interested in evaluation and their inclusion in the process, taking into account different points of view; clear definition of the goal - common agreement on why evaluation should serve and whose interests will be represented in this process; setting standards of conduct - ensuring the protection of personal data of respondents, agreeing who and what will be responsible, supporting the evaluation process, initiating, planning and implementing activities, informing stakeholders about the progress and results of evaluation, discussing them and making decisions on further actions; clear and important questions - clear and unambiguous formulation of evaluation questions relevant to the entity initiating the evaluation and stakeholders; reasonable range - adjusted to a specific time and budget; sufficient time for data analysis and information flow; documenting results to ensure further possibilities use of collected materials and data; systematic character - good evaluation should not be a one-off action, but a regular procedure; Implementation of recommendations - the evaluation is to take specific actions aimed at improving and developing a given undertaking.

When conducting an evaluation study, you must keep in mind those issues that may distort its results - then the study will not be reliable and conclusions drawn based on the results may significantly differ from reality. [5]

The most common mistakes made by people who carry out evaluation in the broadly understood social welfare system:

- avoiding problematic issues (so-called "sweeping the problems under the carpet");
- focusing on areas functioning correctly in order to show successes and hide defeats, eg failure to implement the intended indicators
- not giving yourself the right to make mistakes that are inseparable from learning and development
- unwillingness to use the results of evaluation and implementation of any recommendations.
- lack of evaluation schedule - a detailed schedule of the work carried out, appointment of persons responsible for the given activities or assignment of responsibility to one person in the absence of the remaining involvement;
- insufficient resources - the purpose of evaluating too little time, financial resources and hands to work;
- lack of evaluation concept - conducting evaluation without prior specification of its purpose, criteria and evaluation questions;
- copying the concept of evaluation - someone else's or own (conducted in the past) of evaluations that do not correspond to the assumptions and conditions for the implementation of the current project, as well as the problems currently encountered [6]

2. 2. The role of research in creating standards of services in social assistance.

When addressing the role of research in the standardization of services provided to the customer using the social assistance system, it is important to understand the concept of the service itself. Dictionaries of sociology and social sciences, defines services as: a loosely defined group of economic activities that require a large workforce commitment and related to finance, sales, distribution (transport, trade, wholesale) and enterprises and professions related to various forms of personal care. A different understanding of the concept of service, in its definition, is shown by scientists Bill Hollins and Sadie Shinks: A service is any act or benefit that can be given to someone else and is immaterial and has no effect on ownership of anything. Its production may or may not be related to a physical product. From the above definitions, it is easy to distinguish two basic features that characterize services: immateriality, satisfying the needs. In the book edited by Stanisław Flejterski titled Contemporary economy of services, a number of additional features defining services have been distinguished: non-uniformity - services can't be shown and stored, impermanence - inability to store services, simultaneity of the process of provision and consumption - limited time to provide the service to the buyer, no opportunity to purchase the service - benefits to someone else the thing can't be a secondary trade. [7]

There are many types of services, from the most widespread (consumer, production, general) to less known (heterogeneous, preferred), but very often omit the whole group of social services that are closely related to social services or caring. Social services are understood as a specific form of services offered for the direct satisfaction of human needs. The availability and quality of the services offered significantly affect specific communities and social groups, are obtained in a free, partially paid or fully paid manner. Social services can be provided through public and private institutions. We can classify them into those that relate to the economic sphere and have the task of being motivational, and those that are socio-humanistic in nature, whose goal is to keep man in good psychophysical condition and

interfere in people's value systems, their motivations and behaviors. . Undoubtedly, social services should be included in numerous service classifications, due to the fact that they implement the tasks of state social policy and, in addition, play a significant role in the process of quantitative and qualitative reproduction. The basic areas of social services include: education and upbringing, health protection, social welfare, resocialization, culture, recreation and leisure, social housing. [8]

Over the last few years, a topic related to the standardization of broadly understood social services as well as services provided to clients who are victims of domestic violence has been addressed. The very word standard means as much as meets certain requirements, standards defining the basic requirements set for something. Deepening the considerations, through the standard, we can also understand a certain general, accepted principle, a specific rule, a recipe, a formula, a quantity, a measure, a certain set boundary. Standards are also accepted for services consisting of:

- the standard of the characteristics of a person or team that provides a given service, strongly associated with the characteristics of the service provider. It refers to the requirements that it should fulfill, first of all in terms of education, knowledge, skills, personality, temperament, criminal record, fitness, specific team composition;
- the standard of activities is the next step in the standardization of the service. Required knowledge about the service offered, the ability to provide the service;
- the standard of tools and instruments, the requirements for the means by which the service will be performed. Offering a service, without tools of appropriate quality, significantly reduces its effectiveness, causing difficulties or in some cases the impossibility of its implementation;
- the standard of resources, referring to your human capital, equipment or physical capital;
- the effect standard, manifested by the results, the result to be achieved by the service provider by providing the service;
- an approach standard, especially related to services that have a long tradition. The approach standard consists mainly of various philosophical, axiological assumptions, principles and methods of action adapted to these assumptions in the implementation of a given service;
- the standard of the recipient of the service, the least obvious, referring to the requirements for customers. Particularly visible in social and public services (requirements for the unemployed, disabled, etc.)

Creating standards for various services, and above all for people using the social welfare system, it is necessary to consider what functions these standards fulfill. The introduction of standards is primarily intended to improve the quality and efficiency of services offered - this is the main and most widespread idea guiding standardization activities. In the area of social services, we can mention four basic functions of standards: normogen - understood as the arrangement of relations between quantitative and qualitative, service delivery criteria, stimulating - the impact of factors on the market of social services, economic - financial realism of providing a given service, social - a factor shaping the quality of life .

Barbara Szatur - Jaworska in his book *Fri Evaluation in social services*, presents the benefits of implementing standards, thus answering the question - why introduce standards?

- The implementation of standards contributes to the improvement of the quality of services.
- The standards are used for the process of evaluation of a given service.
- They are a determinant for planning new services and their significance.
- They contribute to the resolution of disputable issues, the rightness of action.
- Increase credibility and trust in the services offered.
- They protect the personal rights of recipients and providers of a given service. [8]

The very standardization of services is a kind of process, aimed at creating, adopting and implementing developed standards. The initiation of the standardization process may be initiated by public authorities, in particular when we deal with services offered by public institutions or by other service providers who have decided to improve the quality of services offered. Very often, standardization is tantamount to applicable law, then we are dealing with statutory standards.

The stages of creating standards are among the first steps of the standardization process, it is the first and one of the most important stages in which the reflection on the services offered is made, as well as for the diagnosis of the needs of a specific social group to which specific services are addressed. Talks about proposed changes with local representatives of social services are made. The following stages of the process include: establishment, application, monitoring and evaluation of accepted standards.

In the literature, a significant number of types of standards are mentioned. The most well-known, include the statutory standard referred to above, defined, for example, by a municipality resolution, an administrative standard defined by the entity ordering the service outside, internal standard, determined by internal decisions of the entity that performs the service, minimum standard, including basic standards and principles taking into account the development of a given civilization, a normative standard defining the criteria for a given service, physical standards referring to the furnishing of rooms.

Several standards have already been developed in Polish law in the field of broadly understood social assistance, including standards of basic services provided by social welfare homes, standards of services provided in care and education centers, and standards of services provided to clients who are victims of domestic violence. Attention should also be paid to the standards that arose in the non-legal context - the Ethical Code of the Polish Society of Social Workers, containing standards of ethical behavior, while performing activities related to the profession of a social worker. Creating accurate standards undoubtedly requires thorough scientific knowledge about a given service. Standardization contributes to wider changes in the social welfare system, which are aimed at changing the way of managing the public services sector. Standardization activities undoubtedly contribute to the improvement of the quality of services provided to social welfare clients, thus creating an opportunity to quickly overcome a difficult life situation. However, attention should be paid to the fact that the introduction of inappropriate standards, in an unprofessional way, can have the opposite effects. [9]

Actions to counteract domestic violence should also focus on the continuous improvement of their quality and effectiveness, especially through the development of standards for services.

The standardization of the services provided consists mainly of specific practical skills and knowledge of the principles of professional ethics.

It seems that the principles of ethics, eg when working with victims of domestic violence, form the basis for shaping the standards of assistance. Because actions related to counteracting domestic violence do not connect with the problem, but with the client who remains in crisis, it causes that we are dealing with a person with inalienable rights to: dignity, self-determination, needs, views, beliefs. The professional provision of services to persons who are victims of domestic violence should therefore be based on the principles of respect for human dignity as well as on the principle of putting the client's good as the main goal. One of the most important principles that sets standards for helping victims is the principle of respect. Persons experiencing domestic violence should be treated in a friendly way on the part of specialists. One should leave them the same space for power and self-determination about their own lives. [8]

The standards of helping victims of domestic violence are significantly reduced, and thus become unprofessional, in a situation when: the intervener imposes the victim's solutions to the situation, which in his opinion are the only and best way to remedy the problem, show impatience, irritation, anger, burden on the victim responsibility for her life situation, she is on the side of the perpetrator, persuades her to accept the situation, displays behaviors disregarding the use of violence, undermines the credibility of the victim, persuades her to solve the problem on her own, gives responsibility for what will happen to the perpetrator of violence after disclosure situation.

Offering services at the highest level to people who use the social assistance system is possible due to constant monitoring and evaluation of the services offered. Considering the interdisciplinary nature of the activities undertaken in relation, for example, to the family, it is necessary to coordinate undertakings implemented by various entities. In most cases, the role of the coordinator of specialized activities is performed by a social worker. As a result of the evaluation of the client / family situation, we can make a decision to terminate activities in the provision of specific services. It is important to undertake an analysis regarding the final assessment of interdisciplinary activities.

The quality of services provided under the social assistance system in Poland has been the subject of numerous discussions for several years. Increasingly, various activities are undertaken to improve their quality. The quality improvement methods used so far, only in the market sector, such as: Quality Assurance, Total Quality Management or ISO 9000 standards, also appear in the social welfare system. Without a doubt, quality can be understood in a very diverse way, but it becomes the subject of legal provisions of the European Union as well:

- European Quality in Social Services, a document that forms the basis for the certification of social services;
- Common Quality Framework for Social Services of General Interest, a framework for the quality of social services and public benefit.

The very components of quality, the social welfare system, can be referred to seven basic groups: applicability - the role of science and social welfare technologies to increase well-being; effectiveness - to what extent the improvement of well-being achievable is achieved; efficiency - maintaining the effects of well-being, while reducing costs; optimality - balancing the improvement of well-being with the costs of this improvement. [9]

2. 3. Commune as an area of social assistance activities and the area of evaluation research

Tasks in the field of social assistance in the commune result from the legal provisions contained in the Act on Social Assistance of March 12, 2004. The Act clearly defines individual actions, imposing the obligation to implement them.

The municipality's own tasks in the field of social assistance, of an obligatory nature, include: developing and implementing a communal strategy for solving social problems, with particular emphasis on social assistance programs, prevention and solving of alcohol and other problems aimed at integration of individuals and families from special risk groups; balance of the commune's needs in terms of social assistance, provision of shelter, provision of meals and necessary clothing to those deprived, granting and payment of periodic benefits, granting and paying of targeted benefits, awarding and paying of targeted benefits to cover expenses resulting from fortuitous events, granting and payment of benefits intentional to cover expenses for health services for homeless people and other persons who do not have income and the possibility of obtaining benefits under the provisions on general insurance in NFZ/ National health Fund/, op. paying premiums for retirement and pension insurance for a person who resigns from employment in connection with the need to exercise direct, personal care for a long-term or seriously ill family member and living with him / her: mother, father or siblings. implementation of social work, organization and provision of care services, including specialist ones, in the place of residence, excluding specialist care services for people with mental disorders, conducting and providing places in care and educational facilities, day support or protected apartments, creation of a communal prevention system and caring for a child and family, feeding children, organizing or financing a funeral, including homeless people, referring to a social welfare home and paying for the stay of a commune's inhabitant in this house, preparing reports and submitting them to the appropriate voivode, also in the form of an electronic document, using the ICT system, creating and maintaining a social assistance center, including providing funds for employees' remuneration, granting and paying permanent benefits, paying premiums for health insurance, defined in the provisions on health care services financed from public funds. [10]

Other tasks of the municipality include: granting and paying special purpose allowances, granting and payment of aid for economic self-empowerment - in the form of benefits, loans and assistance in kind, running and providing places in social welfare homes and municipal support centers, and directing to them people in need of care, undertaking other tasks in the field of social assistance resulting from the commune's recognized needs, including the creation and implementation of protective programs, cooperation with the labor office in the field of dissemination of job offers and information about vacancies, dissemination of information about vocational guidance and training. [11]

The commune is also obliged to implement government administration activities: organization and provision of specialized care services in the place of residence for people with mental disorders, granting and paying of targeted benefits to cover expenses related to natural or ecological disaster, running and development of environmental infrastructure of self-help houses for people with mental disorders, implementation of tasks resulting from government social assistance programs, aimed at protecting the standard of living of people, families and social groups and development of specialist support, granting and paying of targeted benefits, also providing shelter, meals and necessary clothing to foreigners, paying remuneration for taking care. [12]

The above-mentioned catalog of tasks fully illustrates a very wide range of activities within the social assistance policy in the commune. The large scope of entrusted duties can only be realized by professional social services that bring together employees at the highest level. Highly qualified staff of broadly understood social assistance, together with appropriate tools, is a guarantee of performing statutory tasks. The implementation of tasks in the best possible way serves primarily social welfare clients, thus contributing to the resolution of the crisis as soon as possible and the commencement of further functioning regardless of the support of local social assistance institutions [13].

It should be noted that very little space is devoted to the study of essential elements in the functioning of the institution, including, among others:

- opinions of the institution's clients about the offered quality of service;
- relationships between the frequency of clients using the services of the institution and their opinion on the recommendations of the institution's services;
- behavior of employees of institutions, which in the opinion of customers significantly affect the assessment of the quality of their service;
- organizational and technical factors resulting from the activities of institutions, which, in the opinion of customers, affect the assessment of the quality of services offered [14].

3. CONCLUSIONS

From the perspective of different views on the role of research in the social welfare system, there is no doubt that openness to the research itself and the ability to use their results in practice can become the key to solving many problems that have been present in the social welfare system for years. [15] However, it should be borne in mind that the contemporary social welfare system is undergoing constant changes, which are dictated by newer problems and social issues, which until recently were not known in the assistance system. For this reason, the role of research and their practical use seems to be very significant.

The work introduces the subject of the evaluation concept itself, but also points out that it is important that clients using social assistance services may express their own opinions on the offered service standards. The proposal to introduce evaluation studies as a permanent element of the functioning of the assistance system will contribute to obtaining relevant information that can be used by decision-makers to improve the aid process itself, as well as to eliminate those elements that make the process difficult. [16]

A look at actions through the prism of their beneficiaries is undoubtedly a good practice, which should be systematically carried out especially in those institutions where people are provided with assistance in various life crises, eg experiencing domestic violence, thus building a high standard of services that translates into professional diagnosis and help eg for a person experiencing domestic violence. [17]

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