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RESEARCH PROJECT DRAFT

CHILD WELFARE POLICIES AND THE CHANGES OF THE WELFARE SYSTEM IN ITALY. HOW THEY AFFECT SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE.

Background

Italy has developed a corporatist, conservative welfare system (Esping Andersen 1993) but the Social Services Act (L. 328/2000) of year 2000 has tried to develop a more universalistic model, at least within a part of this system. The previous introduction of a innovative Children Act in 1997 provided also a balanced statutory framework within which there exists duties to identify and protect children in need, alongside those to identify and protecting children at risk of suffering significant harm .

But lack of financial resources and unclear political strategies are making difficult the implementation of this kind legislation. Building on field a clear family service orientation, characterized by a tendency to understand acts and to work with all the members of a family, is, so far, very difficult and it is not clear, in fact, if it is prevailing in Italy a Child Protection or a Child Welfare orientation within the Social Services.

Moreover the slow federalization process of the political system is making more evident that, in some part of Italy, the existing welfare model can be considered rudimentary with minimal legal rights for social security and the development of Social Services patchy and uncoordinated (Lorenz 1994).

The research project

The goal of this research is to investigate which changes, due to this situation, at the field level in the Children and Families Services, have been developing.

How Social Workers practice has be affected in the recent years by this confuse Institutional frame? What kind of organizational changes are developing within local social agencies and how important is workplace support and leadership now ? Which kind of relationship between Social Workers and clients can be built ? What is the Workers' perception of their job and how important is their self-motivation nowadays?

The methodology

This research wants to be a (multi) case study that will be developed in three different public social agencies in the same Region (Liguria). Qualitative tools like in depth, open ended interviews will be used to gather data from all case managers. The interviews will be analyzed with the technique of the narrative analysis (Riessman 2008), The data that will emerge from the interviews will be discussed in focus groups with the same Social Workers.

As a preliminary part of the research it will be carried out a descriptive analysis on the available data on clients within these agencies (with quantitative methods) and on existing procedures on Child intervention, in order to have a clearer picture of the Service situation.

Being the project elaboration in progress, it is also considered the possibility of a comparative study between an Italian social agency for children and families and a similar social agency from a country of northern Europe where a universalistic system is implemented.

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