

Rasa Naujaniene

Social Work Department
Faculty of Social Welfare
Vytautas Magnus University

r.naujaniene@sgf.vdu.lt

PRACTISING SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE RESEARCH

In Lithuania social work is something which is still quite vague as a profession, as much among social workers as other professionals. The predominate attitude is still that social work is a job anyone can do, because it is “doing good” and anyone can be a “do-gooder”. This simplistic attitude forces me to wonder about what theoretical as well as methodological method would best reflect the actual complexity of the social work profession (Naujaniene 2007, 173). The social work practice varies from clinical social work that sometimes takes place in private practice settings to community organization, social policy and planning as well as social development (Hare 2004). Payne (1997, 21) suggests a view of “social work” as a process along a socially and historically formed route which brings clients and workers together within an organizational context. A social worker is expected use such knowledge by rethinking her/his own approach to a situation. However, practice situations are changing. The tendency is that existing professional knowledge is no longer adaptable to the complex, uncertain, unstable and unique character of practice situations involving value conflicts. Such situations are increasingly perceived as central to the world of professional practice (Schon 1991, 14). Regarding to this, Karvinen (1999, 279) notes that “social work expertise is characteristically dialogic, discursive and reflexive”. Thus, social work as a discipline has special area of knowledge, possible to a given time and place. This has to be understood not only as a text, but also as a way of acting by whose who are involved in social work discourse. Ways of acting creates clients and workers, which are in particular power relations and within certain sets of practice. The multiplicity of discourse suggests that social work, as a discourse consists from many discourses offering alternative views and allowing for space for human agency. “Discourses shape social work practice” and social workers can use the discourses that influence their practice domain (Healy 2005, 9). Authoress points that biomedicine, economic and law discourses are dominant in social work practice, while ideas and practices coming from sociology and psychology compose services discourses. Discourses from consumer rights movements and religion and spirituality are considered as alternative discourses. Based on above presented theoretical premises I conducted the study which aim was to reveal the interplay of different discourses in social work practice based on accounts written by social workers about their practice case with particular client. The theoretical and methodological background for the study was inspired by readings about constructive social work (Parton & O’Byrne 2000; Parton 2003; Butt & Parton 2005). Fook (2000) proposed that the practice is more complex and contextual and “practitioners tend to create their own theory” instead of using fixed theories (p. 114). This suggests that the inductive manner of theorizing about social work practice is relevant to reveal what discourses interplay in social work practice. The data of the study consist from written social workers’ reports about their real practice cases. The aim of the study encompass two fields—the field of knowledge and field of practice. These are “not fully in sync, [but] influence one another” (Chambon 1999, 57). Chambon argues that “things do not exist outside our naming them” (p. 75). That suggests that people see things in particular ways relative with the concepts and theories which people have developed about these things. It is how things are named, characterized, explained and predicted that constitute a certain view of reality. The way we talk about our practice is actually part of our practice, since language is our main tool for communication about what we do (Hawkins et al. 2001, 2). During text analysis I looked at certain aspects structured according to research question: what discourses are dominant in social workers reports about their practice with client and what discourses are hidden or

silent at all in these reports. Based on social constructionist approach through text analysis of research data was developed framework for practice case analysis and conceptualization with the aim to specify how social worker's way of acting in practice can become more purposeful and effective.

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