



СОЦИАЛНА ПЕДАГОГИКА

SOCIAL EDUCATION

THE PROCESS OF SOCIAL AND PEDAGOGICAL WORK
WITH INDIVIDUAL CLIENTS

Yana Dimitrova¹

Abstract: *This publication presents the process in the work of the social worker with an individual client, as well as the tasks and activities of helping specialists in their order and sequence. It considers some practical models of the phases and steps in the process of individual case work, presented and described by a number of authors, and representing the professional literature on social work in Bulgaria and worldwide.*

Keywords: *individual work; case work; social work models.*

Introduction

Processuality in working with an individual client can be considered and analyzed in several aspects:

- ✓ as subsequent stages (phases, steps) in the work and actions undertaken by social workers and teams when taking a case, managing a case, undertaking interventions, etc.
- ✓ as development of the case in general – this is the process of overall change in the situation (both personal – of the assisted person, and working – of the applied interventions) in which the client is; this is a change over time in the ratio between the need for support and the rising independence of the client, as this change modifies the image and status of the case in general.
- ✓ as a process of change in the possibilities and level of functioning of the personality that takes place and can be traced on a more personal level – in this sense, the process of social work here has already found expression as a process of personal development; in fact, this is the resulting aspect of the helping process, and it manifests itself in the consequent accumulations of positive changes in the status of the client, and in his/her abilities to cope and function fully.

These three changes of processuality in the implementation of social work on a case are simultaneously implemented. What is the expression of the individual approach in each of them? The first aspect is organizational and methodological by nature. It is, to the greatest extent, constant and applicable in a planned and lawful order in all assisted cases. In this sense, it is, in itself, the least adaptable to the client's individual peculiarities

¹ Яна Михайлова Димитрова – главен асистент, доктор, преподавател по социална педагогика в катедра „Педагогика“, Педагогически факултет на ВТУ „Св св. Кирил и Методий“, e-mail: y_dimitrova@abv.bg

as far as it is practiced standardly, following the consequent procedure of serving. The second dimension is far more changeable and flexible, and it is exactly here that the dynamic interaction is expressed between the undertaken steps and applied interventions on the one hand, and the answer, the changes in the client and his/her status on the other hand. The third aspect of interpreting processuality in social work is closely individual, and here the influence of personal power, activity, reasons, personal qualities, potential, and real abilities to change are found to have the strongest manifestation. The process of personal development towards larger stability, maturity and independence, however, is strongly bound to the quality and level of the intervention and of the helping process in general in the first two aspects.

Methodology

The organizational and methodological model of the process of social work with an individual client determines separate phases which create working, conceptual, and procedural fundamentals of the methodology of real helping.

Individual case work phases are determined in a way that they can move the client and the working interventions consequently towards support and change. They also contain the internal dynamics of change, the processuality of change in the status, the possibilities for functioning, the client's independence, the growing, coping with, nature, and level of needs. In this sense, phases in case work have an organizational and methodological role; moreover, they imply changes in the content, level, a narrower focus, and the logic of individualization.

Specific practical models of the phases and steps of the process of case work are described and explained by a number of authors, representing professional literature on social work in the country and worldwide. For example, Cristina de Robertis refers to the medical model of helping and standard realization of help through 'situational analysis, diagnosis and treatment' (De Robertis, 2007: 111), practically relating these three phases respectively to the beginning, middle, and end of the professional support of the assisted client.

The process of case work is also described by Grace Mathew who determines it as 'the continuous movement of the ongoing development of the case, involving several activities – some performed only by the social worker, some by the client only, and some by both' (Mathew, 1992: 152). The process includes the following steps and operations: social research, social evaluation, helping, and outcome evaluation (Mathew, 1992: 152–155).

In developing his concept of the interactive approach in the work with individual clients in processual terms, L. Shulman outlines four consequent phases in helping:

✓ preliminary phase – dedicated to the preparation of a new contact with a client and to the communication with the latter;

✓ beginning phase – it includes the development of a helping type of relations, the contracting and construction of a clear working structure; here the author emphasizes exclusively on the interactive aspects of the process, on the dynamics of relations, as well as on the participation of the client in specifying problems, defining the objectives of work and the roles of each entity in the joint helping activity;

✓ middle (working) phase – this is the active phase of case work, which has a stage-by-stage nature and leads the client to consequent changes in his/her status, coping with the contracted problem fields.

✓ ending and transition phase – the social worker and the client bring their working relations to an end, and the client prepares for a new, independent life (Shulman, 1997: 6–173).

Bulgarian theory and methodology of social work use a model described by N. Petrova-Dimitrova in which the process of individual case work goes through:

- *the first phase* of establishing contact, case research, orientation in the problem, and preliminary contracting;

- *the second phase* of case diagnosis and evaluation;

- *the third working phase* in which, according to N. Petrova-Dimitrova, an action plan is prepared, negotiated, and carried out;

- *the fourth phase* of case work in which outcome evaluation and completion is performed (Petrova-Dimitrova, 2013: 72–112).

One of the well-known models of social work, developed by V. Compton and V. Galaway (Compton and Galaway, 1999, according to Jaco, 2005: 300) and based on the problem-solving approach, outlines four phases: engagement, evaluation, intervention, and outcome evaluation. Within these phases, the authors outline and describe specific actions to be performed and skills to be shown by both practitioner and client.

Another author, Barbra Teater, describes the phases in social work with an individual client as revolving around the so-called *life model*. This practice is aimed at working with individuals, using their strengths and resources to create a positive and harmonious human-environment interaction, thereby facilitating stressors and achieving positive change and development. The model is built and organized in three phases: initial, ongoing, and ending (Gitterman, 2009, according to Teater, 2010: 29).

Other methods of consequent structuring of the activity in individual case work can also be mentioned. Their review shows a possibility for their differentiation into technological and therapeutic according to the leading principle that lies at the heart of the development of the process and activity, of the improvement and tracing of the phasing. In technological models, it is rather the phasing of the actions, whereas in the therapeutic models it is phasing and sequence of interventions, but mostly of qualitative changes and development.

Technological models. In this type of models, the process of case management is considered in procedural terms, with clearly expressed phasing and sequence of activities. The phases in the whole process and the steps that the social worker has to follow are described. In such an approach, a high degree of standardization of the prescribed procedure is achieved, as technological models follow and express principles and regularities of the processes of education and social work. Technological models of the process of case management are applicable within the specific type of structure, social work institution, and in a certain field or work with a specific type of clients (Mehandzhiyska, 2003: 301–314).

Given one summarizing applied model of *differentiation* and phase structuring and the more specific activities in the process of work with an individual client, we can suggest the summarized methodological option showed in Table 1.

Table 1. Model of Organizational and Methodological Sequence of Individual Case Work

<p>PRELIMINARY PHASE <u>Maintaining organizational and methodological readiness</u> <u>Marketing of services, informing about activities</u> <u>Organized ‘input’ – for requests, applications, signals, primary contacts</u></p> <p>BEGINNING PHASE <u>Taking the case</u> <i>Reception or study on a signal</i> <i>Contact</i> <i>Collection of information, establishing circumstances and data</i> <i>Clarification and acceptance of a request</i> <u>Primary assessment</u> <i>Primary interview</i> <i>Establishing and formulating problems, deficits, dysfunctions</i> <i>Identifying resources, strengths, opportunities</i> <i>Conceptualization and formulation of the case</i> <i>Assessment of needs and expectations</i> <u>Negotiating and planning</u> <i>Discussion of the evaluation and its conclusions</i> <i>Determination and coordination of objectives and ways to help</i> <i>Development of an individual plan</i> <i>Discussion, coordination on the plan</i></p>	<p>WORKING PHASE <u>Implementation of planned interventions</u> <i>Provision of services and other forms of support</i> <i>Maintaining contacts and working relationships</i> <i>Individual interventions</i> <i>Mediation and work in the client’s environment</i> <u>Track and review</u> <i>Case tracking, monitoring</i> <i>Case overview</i> <i>Current (interim) or final evaluation of changes</i> <u>Update the plan</u></p> <p>CASE ENDING PHASE Evaluating the results of the overall work process Support for self-management Ending the relationship Administrative, documentation ending</p> <p>TRANSITION PHASE AND POST-WORKING ACTIVITIES Support for relapse prevention Providing access to post-working advice and other forms of support Maintaining a documentation record</p>
--	--

As seen in Table 1, the model mostly suggests a **technological summary** of the philosophy and logic of the management of the individual client's case in social work. It can be useful for the organization and coordination of support, as well as for the needs of administrative and managerial supervision in social work.

The so-called *medical approach* in the planning and methodological description of the process of work with a separate case is traditionally present in the methodology of individual social work. This approach is focused on a specific problem, disorder, and the achievement of problem solving and correction (Mehandzhiyska, 2003: 301–314). In this sense, the following model of activities in the individual case management can also be defined as medical, as it includes:

- monitoring;
- diagnostics;
- prognosis;
- work schedule, prescriptions;
- control over the application of prescriptions, information on results (Gassin, 1990: 656).

Therapeutic models. They are applicable in cases in which it is necessary to include psychotherapeutic approaches and the respective techniques in the individual work with a client. In these models, the process of case management is considered mainly a process of achieving a change in the client, as processuality and phases are related to a specific concept of change mechanism. Usually, according to the methodological prescriptions, the social worker moves to the next phase only after having achieved results in the behaviour, personality, and quality of functioning of the client in the previous phase. Psychotherapeutic case management models are focused on the client's individuality in the variety of its problems, own activity, and participation in the therapeutic or helping process. There is also a focus on principles, requirements, techniques, and rules specific to a certain therapeutic method and for a separate phase (Mehandzhiyska, 2003, 301–314). We present examples of this type of models:

Both models presented illustrate in detail the specifics in therapeutic models. They actually show the organization of the path of consequent changes in the case – mainly in the client him-/herself, but not only. Interventions and the idea of upgrading changes are also engaged with the social environment, with the inclusion, participation in the complex of interventions, with the transfer of the action 'outside' the therapeutic process and the therapeutic relationship, and also with the role of the helping specialist – consultant or clinical social worker. We can also add that not all therapeutic approaches have strictly differentiable phases – in some cases, help and change are the product of therapeutic factors that can act not only non-chronologically, but also strongly and stabilizingly.

The linear or cyclic process of work on a case is usually a flexible practice, which leaves open the question about the process outcome. As far as this is an issue concerning outcomes, satisfaction, and achievement of the objectives of the helping activity, in practice and especially from the perspective of quality management in the field of social activities, the linear progress of case work is expected to reach an end when an established permanent and favourable change has appeared in the client's life. However, it is exactly the dynamics of individualization of the work on the case what makes the placement of the process within the framework and steps of technological descriptions and prescriptions extremely difficult. Although they have a useful theoretical and methodological application and significance, the descriptions of the phases in the process of social work on a case, applied individually, hold in a peculiar way, by individually specified rates and order with different people. The flexible readiness of the case manager to establish, in each client, an individual route of change, of moving on and returning, of following and deviation, is in fact the valuable orientation that creates process models under the conditions of real direct practice.

Outcomes

As the review shows, some models structure rather the activity process, others describe the process of internal changes, and there are models which try to integrate and suggest coordinated, synchronous phasing, simultaneously providing space for flexibility and adaptability; they implement individualization at the stages of the support and change process.

In all case categories, the models defining process phasing provide, more or less, for participation of the client with his/her respective roles and activities, specific for each phase. In these models, which are developed on a more detailed relation between philosophy and principles of work on the one hand, and the steps and techniques on the other hand, the consistent assumption of roles and responsibilities by the client serves especially for developmental objectives. In this way, the transition to a higher phase of social work introduces the client him-/herself into a new situation, as the latter has to face the tasks and necessity for supported assumption of responsibilities and development of new skills; the whole process thus goes towards the main objective of individual case work – personal development, stabilization of psychosocial status, and individual-environment interactions, increasing the level of functioning of the individual, his/her autonomy and independence (Minev, 2012: 331).

Discussion

What other meanings and projections result from the analysis? We can also consider that the separation of individual phases structures work and maintains consistency of work steps and actions, making them clearer and more visible for the persons served and their relatives. The identification of the phase of development and change of the client and his/her coordination with the phase in which the work activities of the helping specialists are implemented, is also a basic principle of compliance with the individual rates and needs of the assisted person in the coordinated team case management.

Conclusion

Phases in individual case work create space for expected individual case dynamics. The nature of the work implies that a client with his/her evaluated status, peculiarities, needs, and interactions in the surrounding environment will not remain static and unchanged throughout the intervention process. Moreover, the change is even a process objective. Thus, the models of consequent activities ensure a type of process routing, as this is precisely what gives methodological possibilities for orientation, as well as for returning when this is individually necessary in a certain case. For example, *returning* to the initial phase according to the cycling model of case work; such an example are the *relapses* in motivation-oriented work where the case, after unsuccessfully passing through the phase of *hold*, is repeated and returns to the process of reflection.

REFERENCES

- Механджийска, Г. (2003).** Методика на водене на случай в социалната работа с деца с девиантно поведение. – В: Превенция на девиантното поведение на децата. С., Компливес-ЛИМ. // **Mehandzhiyska, G. (2003).** Metodika na vodene na sluchay v socialnata rabota s detsa s deviantno povedenie. – V: Preventsiya na deviantното povedenie na detsata. S., Komplives-LM.
- Минев, Т. (2012).** Теоретични и методически основи на социалната работа. В.Т., Фабер. // **Minev, T. (2012).** Teoretichni i metodicheski osnovi na sotsialnata rabota. V.T., Faber.
- Петрова-Димитрова, Н. (2013).** Основи и методи на социалната работа. С., Вѣда Словѣна. // **Petrova-Dimitrova, N. (2013).** Osnovi i metodi na sotsialnata rabota. S., Veda Slovena.
- Шулман, Л. (1997).** Изкуството да се помага на индивиди, семейства и групи. С., Фондация „Невронауки и поведение“. // **Shulman, L. (1997).** Izkustvoto da se pomaga na individi, semeystva i grupi. S., Fondatsia „Nevronauki i povedenie“.
- De Robertis, C. (2007)** Methodologie de l'intervention en travail social. Paris: Bayard.
- Gassin, R. (1990).** Criminologie. Paris.
- Ясо, R. M. (2005).** Problem-solving theory. – In: Turner, F. J. (ed.). *Encyclopedia of Canadian Social Work*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- Mathew, G. (1992).** *Introduction to social case work*. Bombay: Tata Institute of Social Sciences.
- Teater, B. (2014).** An introduction to applying social work theories and methods. New York: Open University Press.