
SOCIAL WORKER'S ROLE IN THE REHABILITATION OF THE CHILDREN IN STREET SITUATION IN TIRANA CITY**Lorena Çadri**

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Abstract: Albania is a developing country and the social problems encountered are various as well as numerous. Children in street situation are part of a vulnerable category which deserves a lot of attention. However, the situation, the challenges faced by this target group is not sufficiently studied by psychologists, social workers or the healthcare system in Albania. Social assistance programs and individualized assistance are integrative instruments that assess their needs and enable planning and co-ordination of services with the active participation of the state and society. Although Albanian state institutions aim to improve the effectiveness of the social protection system and the quality of social services for vulnerable groups, there are no state mechanisms to identify, protect and enhance the rehabilitation of all children in street situations or of the abused ones. This is due to multiple factors, including the lack of functional structures and mechanisms issued and implemented by the policy and decision-making bodies, limited NGO's authorities provided, as well as the existing gaps in the legislative framework. All the respective stakeholders do not have a coordination system in order to implement activities which would bring the elimination of this phenomenon. The situation regarding this target group is worrying in Albania, especially in Tirana where the number of inhabitants is always increasing. There are people with different socio-economic status and the number of children in street situation is bigger than in the other cities of Albania, therefore this is the principal reason why this study is focused and limited in the city of Tirana. Among the stakeholders who play an important role in policy making, programs for the rehabilitation and improvement of these children in street situation, is the social worker. The purpose of this paper is to identify the role of the social worker in Tirana city, the effectiveness they bring in designing programs to help children in street situation regarding their rehabilitation and integration and social development, including those children who belong to communities of ethnic minorities who face very difficult living conditions. In Albania, where there is still a lack of social welfare systems, the role of psychologist and social worker is sometimes overwhelmed and thus ineffective in carrying out various tasks and duties at the same time, which obstruct them not to fully contribute to important issues such as treating and rehabilitating children in street situation. This paper will provide the reasons why the social workers in Albania cannot perform their tasks effectively, as well as it aims to clarify the true role of the social worker in the social services offered for the children in the street situation in the city of Tirana and what is needed to help and improve the situation of this target group.

Keyword: children in the street situation, social worker, services, rehabilitation

1. INTRODUCTION

There are many issues to be treated and considered in the Albanian society which are directly related to children, but a more problematic issue is the situation for the children in street situations. Social services are essentially intended and structured so as to meet the needs of the society. If we take into account the children who need physical, educational and social care, and if these services are not provided by the family, it is understandable that the basic needs and care are to be provided and supplemented by social institutions and persons who provide these services, who are the social workers, psychologists etc. But how effective are these services in a city like Tirana, where the number of children in street situation is about 800 children? In Tirana, this situation seems obvious and tangible, it is a real problem that requires a solution and a support from the Albanian society because the number of these children who wander hopelessly is growing and the negligence of the responsible institutions to improve the situation and the welfare of these children in street situations must come to an end. They must react and improve the quality of social services that are offered for this category.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research method used in this study is the qualitative. The reason for this selection lies in the fact that it is the most the most appropriate method related to the purpose, so that this study is as qualitative and valid as possible in terms of research perspective because it aims to address the issue by being based on real situations and facts and also in the existing reality in Albania, which is faced by the social workers. To bring this study to light, it has been conducted a thorough research from various sources regarding the role of the social workers in treating and dealing with the issues of the children in street situation. Also, there are some interviews with the service providers in the field of children protection, with whom further semi-structured interviews were conducted as

well. Nevertheless, this study has its limitations which do not make it possible to generalize the results and findings.

3. STATE RESPONSIBILITY IN PROVIDING SOCIAL SERVICES

Child protection is part of the protection and promotion of well-being and the category of children as part of the Albanian society, as in all other civilized societies is protected by a whole set of rights contained in state legislation, while the conceptual aspect is part of the concept of universal rights such as: civil, economic, social, cultural and political rights. When these rights belong to children, everyone must give a priority to it including the family and institutions, because children are human beings who are generally unprotected, but also because their today's level of physical and mental development will determine the future of our homeland. When people are under 18 and treated in private institutions, the state covers the share of expenditures in equal measure to the cost of handling them in public institutions. Thus, the law provides children with special support by providing them a part of the funding in cases when they are transferred in private social care institutions. Albania has ratified the United Nations and Council of Europe's main conventions and protocols, which emphasize that children must enjoy full rights and because of their particularities, lack of physical and intellectual maturity, the need for special protection and attention from the family and state institutions (Law No. 86/2013).

4. STATE SOCIAL SERVICES FOR CHILDREN IN STREET SITUATION

In Albania there are some structures which have certain different mechanisms and strategies in order to provide social services for street children who are under the age of 18 and are usually living and / or working in the street, even on a seasonal or transitional basis. (B.Lumanaj, 2011) One of these structures of a great importance is the National Council for the Protection of Children's Rights. The role of the NCPCR is important to ensure and reflect regularly the achievements, the results and progress so that the children live a safe, healthy, happy life and they will have hope for the future. The NCPCR through a coordinated cross-sector approach aims to co-operate with both the state institutions but also with the civil society in order to work hard towards the achievements of the rights of children. The Minister coordinating the work regarding the protection of children's rights is the responsible state authority, who coordinates, with all relevant ministries, issues related to children's rights.

Due to the role and function of this minister has, together with the policy making structure, he drafts state policies and programs in the field of child protection and proposes to the Council of Ministers legal and sub-legal amendments, and signs international acts in the field of child protection. Another stakeholder dealing with the child protection is the State Agency for the Protection of Children's Rights. This is the key institution which aims to monitor the legal framework for the protection of children's rights and to coordinate actions towards the protection of children. Thus, Albania has an extensive and rich legal framework regarding the protection of the children in street situations and also has the relevant state structures for the protection and provision of social services for the children in street situations but nevertheless the situation for this target group needs and deserves much more attention.

4.1. Various Social Services in Tirana City

In Tirana due to the large number of residents and being a relatively developed city compared to other cities of Albania, there are more and more social services functioning. One of the institutions that is functional in all Tirana mini city halls units is the Child Protection Unit (CPU) and functions within the administrative structure of the municipality / commune as a special unit or as a structure unit charged with social issues and task in order to identify and manage the cases of children at risk, located within the area where this unit exercises its jurisdiction. Currently, across the country, there are 196 CPUs which have been set up and function respectively. Another important structure that provides social services is the State Agency for the Protection of Children's Rights. AACPR in cooperation with its partners focuses on protecting children in street situations, protecting children from abuse, respecting their rights and organizing trainings for people who provide these services, mainly to social workers, psychologists and members of non-profit organizations whose focus is on children's rights and protection. The municipalities should also provide the necessary financial resources for the children. The new municipalities must maintain the human capital created over the last few years and empower the genuine CPUs which have more than 1 staff member ((MMSR, 2014). Also, the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare in cooperation with the Ministry of Education play an important role in drafting policies and improving them for the benefit of children and especially those in street situations who are children without protection. These existing structures play an important role in providing effective social services to children in street situations in Tirana by taking effective measures in order to promote children's rights and to provide them with skilled workers so that these children are rehabilitated and new cases will be prevented.

4.2. The profile of a social worker who works with children in street situation

People who provide social services to children in street situations and look after their rehabilitation are the most important persons because the fate of these children is in their hands entirely. A social worker working on child protection policies is required to have specific skills and knowledge on social services with a focus on children. His/her obligations relate to the recognition of all documentation, legal and sub legal acts, national and international agreements in implementation of basic legislation on social services for children in need, including those in street situation. Also, a social worker who works with this target group of children and provides services should know very well the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the relevant legislation, recognize and have experience in recognizing alternative services provided by NGOs, in order to cooperate with all the local stakeholders, NGO in order to draft different strategies for preventing the growth of this phenomenon. A social worker who handles cases and provides services to the children in street situation should be able to manage these cases professionally by choosing the most appropriate intervention method and always maintaining and respecting the ethical code of his/her profession. It should also be knowledgeable in evaluating the services provided so as to be in search of continuous improvement on the quality of these services and also document and report them. But obviously, none of this required knowledge would be of any importance if the social worker is unpopular, also he/she must have the courage to report, denounce cases where something is not respected and implemented properly.

4.3 The real profile and the role of social worker in Albania for the rehabilitation of children in street situation

Regarding the issues discussed above in this study, we can understand that Albania has the appropriate structures for the protection of children in street situation and the necessary legislation to make sure that everything functions normally, but nevertheless the social services provided are not of a high quality and of the standard that they must be. From interviews with social workers, they state that the social workers dealing with their cases do not devote their attention and importance to the children in street situation because they find themselves helpless to offer something more than just counseling, information or raise awareness. This problem, according to the social workers interviewed, is somewhat true as they say that their role is underestimated, it is considered more as a mechanical working role and not as a role or position where they are granted the right to intervene and change policies. Furthermore, the state does not give them the needed power and the right to manage the cases and provide solutions.

However, the state hires these employees in the social services offices to cover a position that is mandatory to be in accordance with the job position terms. This position must go beyond the formal denomination, which in the city of Tirana does not happen as stated by the social services employees, who provide such social services. The functioning of the child protection system is particularly dependent on local authorities. They need to know their role and responsibilities, to provide care and protection for children and to coordinate their actions with the other local stakeholders engaged in child welfare issues. Local government leaders do not, in a few cases, give the necessary importance to the appointment of a special and specifically specified CPU staff and the role of the CPU goes beyond the role of the social administrator. Consequently, by assigning several tasks at once, the workload is greater and the time to devote oneself, as well as the role of a CPU is more limited.

The interviewed social workers admit that they are unable to perform their work effectively, even though there is a lot of will, but often their role is overlapped and there are many tasks and duties that they run at the same time, they have not enough time at their disposal to be effective in providing such needed services. Hence, the quality of the service they offer fails, reducing the opportunities for improvements and deal with professionalism. The particular role of social workers should only be seen in regards of the treatment and quantitative resolution of the problems, but from the point of view of the qualitative assessment of the special needs of the children and of the very important role of the profession of social workers working in these institutions. This is because in the work that is being conducted there are still some perceived underestimations about the value, authority and specific role of the social worker. (Tushe, 2011) Social workers interviewed state that they feel under pressure by the relevant authorities so they are forced to accept the work overload and deal with many cases at the same time, causing them professional consumption as well. Moreover, the change of local institutions' leaders of the municipalities, communes, districts consequently results in the firing of the existing employees and hiring the new ones to work at the CRU and the CPU, somehow it is political even though nobody wants to admit that. Due to the role and responsibility that these structures have in working directly with children and their families, the problems they encounter become more and more sensitive and deserve attention. Frequent changes impede the creation of a sustainable model for the protection of children's rights as an important element in the development of a national system for their protection. In these cases, redundancies destroy what is built and the capacities are wasted, therefore it is required a retraining and further

capacity building time and again. Often, lack of experience or qualification of young employees is also reflected in the productivity of their work.

Furthermore, one of the issues which need to be highlighted in this study is that the social workers emphasize that the lack of co-operation and co-ordination between the relevant structures which are responsible for protecting the children is an handicap and leads to the inefficiencies and incapability to implement policies and strategies. Therefore the social service provided lacks expertise.

"Terre des Hommes", one of the most active civil society organizations, has concluded that the existing services do not constitute a system for child protection, but "snippets" of services and estimates that there is still a lack of a complete legal framework in Albania that specifically addresses the protection of children (Terre des Hommes, 2015). Given this statement and also the interviews conducted in Tirana, it can be concluded that the role of the social worker is not practiced separately from the roles of other social professions creating an overlapping role which brings about a failure in the quality of social services offered to the improvement and rehabilitation of the children in street situation. Social workers do not have the necessary conditions and are not given full responsibility not only to refer the case but also to denounce it, in cases when this employee finds that there is a violation by the authorities or anyone else. For this reason, it is so much needed a correct implementation by the governmental authorities and not only in regards of the implementation of laws, policies and strategies so that we can see and evidence an improvement in the situation of these children in street situation.

5. CONCLUSION

From the findings it can be concluded that in Albania the implementation of the legislation, strategies and social policies related to the protection of children remain in paper and hardly are applied in practice. Lack of co-operation among key stakeholders, which participate when dealing with the cases, leads to a handicapped provision of social services for children in the street situation. One of the stakeholders is the social worker who cannot be effective because his role in dealing with cases as a social worker is most of the time is multi tasking. Local functional social services should be involved in the identification of children in street situation in order to refer them, in the assessment of the situation and the community development, in the provision of appropriate social services, provision of child and family protection plans; provision of a unit and the provision of a coordinated response, the coordination of various services and the delivery of social services that they complement

the needs of children at national level, monitoring the standards of care. To improve this, it is recommended a better division of roles and models of institutional co-operation between NGOs and the public sector which is needed to adequately promote the positive development of children in street situation, NGOs can overcome their isolation and increase the impact through other state and non-state providers of local services and by simplifying bureaucracies and establishing compliance with laws so that the children can receive the social services they deserve and as a result they would improve their livelihoods.

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