

THE SOCIAL ASSISTANCE IN PRISON

by Ioan Durnescu

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In the already known spirit, the Polirom publishing once again offers to the students, specialists, and to the public a commendable paper, a delicate approach - *Social Assistance in Prison*, sociologist John Durnescu's work.

As the title suggests, the book is centered on social assistance, seeking to provide a full basis to both students and social workers who are already working in prison, or, last but not least, to those who oversee the profession - the social worker, but not in areas already known and publicized, but in prison.

Ioan Durnescu holds a course of social care in prison, among others, working on probation and having numerous articles and publications in these two areas. His doctoral thesis on the topic of *Relapse Phenomenon in the Field of Economic Crime*, held at the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Iasi, provides also strong arguments regarding the author's inclination towards these areas.

Since the work had to be directed primarily to the students, it ought to play, apparently, the structure of a university course. I say apparently because the volume is composed of three parts: *Introduction*, *General Theory* and *Intervention*, that actually give this structure, as he proposes. In essence, however, all three parts deal with issues of substance, smoothness, offering a wide range of concepts, explanations, recommendations, approaches each being interdependent with others.

On the other hand the paper redefines the social worker's position in the labor market but focusing it in prison, establishing more precisely the role and place of profession in relation to others in a prison environment. It was not only theoretically but also practical, with a research that used as methods of data collection the questionnaire, interview and the focus group. Frequently used methods provide an anchor of "what is", of the reality existing in the Romanian prison environment and not only. It is revealed in this manner the social worker's role and place in this environment, which falls within the profession even though many aspects are found in other professions (in this case - probation counselor, educator, psychologist, etc..), and the assistant officer is part of a multidisciplinary team.

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A review of prison both in international and Romanian boundaries, supplemented by a legislative framework, argue and supports the profession, the role of a prison social worker with the natural evolution of this medium. From prisons which took the form of *pits, mines or caves where they were imprisoned those who expected the sentence to correctional and appearance of the modern prison system*, in this paper we have depicted a picture of the stages by which this medium has reached the current level, in which we are talking about an individualized punishment, about a team of people around the prisoner, about his rights, integration in this environment, family ties, preparation for release, etc. . *Imprisonment philosophy changed radically, the central concept is the one of normalization of prisoner's life. The central concept expressed by the new philosophy of imprisonment is "positive custody", in which the emphasis is on human conditions of detention.*

The "General Theory" that is the second part of the paper comes to put in relation the delinquent's behavior with the social worker's work. How the sociology or the psychology deals with delinquency aspects, which provides answers and explanations, and how social workers are located in relation to these issues (?) are exemplarily dealt with in the third chapter, continuing with *Theories of intervention* and completing the second part of the work with *the world of captives and the effects of incarceration* on which the author insists, thus eliminating any gap sensation in his attempt. The classical theories and current research in the field permeates the reader a comprehensive approach on the scope covered, all the points outlined being very well intertwined with the environment around which everything revolves throughout the paper, the prison environment.

Not incidentally, the third part of the study, the largest one, is a strategy which, from one angle may be a fully developed plan for working with detainees, and in another may detail specific issues, which also offers solutions, strands shows only certain areas, targeting only certain segments of the social worker working with prisoners. Is developed here a base with which one can work, from which one can start or on which it can be reflected, regardless of the social worker experience, whether experienced or will face in certain situations.

From the initial assessment with all its key points, to working with the person private of his liberty, or working with the group, the last part "Intervention" touches and handle issues of interest to social workers in this environment and beyond. The author opens this last part with "Customizing the system for penalty of imprisonment" starting naturally from the first activity of the social worker working with detainees. The social worker must consider first the individual needs and aspirations, on the other the environment with its special features, in this way it combines these issues by seeking to establish an equilibrium which, as the author says, is related to *science and to the art of social assistance*. Thus, he must prove certain qualities, attitudes, prejudices to be free of any ending for his work to coincide with the initial goals and intended path with every person deprived of

liberty shall be congruent with the actual map. *Vulnerable prisoners, prisoners convicted of sexual offenses* are problems that a professional social worker must control very well, those remembered with certain features that cannot be left in working with them.

Chapter 12, *The Postpenale Assistance* ends the algorithm proposed by the author in the paper work last point marking the trajectory of detainee *accompanied, supported, supervised, advised* by a social worker. Outlined in four stages, the postpenale assistance process involves a work team, a plan, frequent meetings with probation counselor at the residence of the prisoner for a period fixed by agreement, to mobilize resources to solve customer problems, ending *when the customer no longer needs the support of the probation counselor or social worker*.

This paper, from another perspective, in addition to the novelty that lies in its pages, although it is at the contact of more professions, interests are very much in its field, exceeding it, without having a valid general claim. In a context where everyone knows them all, each having the most skill on the skills or treated, I think, honestly, that it is by far an important asset of work.

So, if we were to underline the essence of what it was said above, we can say that the author reshapes a profession vital in the current social context, always bringing practical arguments, anchoring the daily reality of each item - whether primarily or tangentially related - social care in prison. If in other areas and fields the information is redundant, *The Social Assistance in Prison* is a textbook, a critical interpretation of this phenomenon with a seamlessly tick of all items. The language is accessible, clear, it exudes the author's desire that, in particular the work to be consulted by those interested in the field. Even if the target audience is more or less specialized in social work, the paper can be for the wide public a reflection reading of reality in which we all live.