

# **Social and individual contexts of assistance, social support and counselling**

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Conceptions – Discourses – Inspirations

## **Summary**

Life in post-modern society – marked by the discontinuity of social processes and individual experiences, devoid of certainties and axiological signposts, chaotic in its numerous, diverse constituent threads of daily life, and hence often involving the search for assistance in situations of helplessness or where we wish to optimize how we function in different dimensions.

In almost every field of life we observe the activity of specialists in assistance – advisors, consultants, trainers, therapists, mentors, tutors and coaches. Our observations are not always in the spirit of affirmation, but are sometimes made with indifferent distance or open negation and opposition.

Some see the source of these activities in the genuine needs of those not coping with life, the inadequacy of particular individuals or even whole social groups threatened with or subject to real marginalisation and social exclusion, or wishing to optimise how they function in various areas using the resources they possess. Others attribute these activities to fashion, the ease of access to different forms and methods of assistance in both the real and virtual world, to the marketing invasion of numerous agents active in this area of the market.

In describing and attempting to elucidate phenomena related to social support and counselling, we seek an answer to the question of who provides assistance, to whom and in what way, as well as the relations they enter into, how they construct these, and what processes and mechanisms occur in the duration of these relations.

The needs, competences, relations of assistance and advice from both the provider's and recipient's point of view form the basis of the discussions in this volume. We describe and analyze the phenomena in question from the provider's and recipient's point of view. We subject needs, competences and the qualities of relations between these subjects and circumstances to interdisciplinary analysis.

The form of assistance relations is influenced on the one hand by the specific needs and psychodevelopmental of individuals requiring support and their social context (back-

ground, the provider's relations simultaneously remains outside the bounds of the assistance being given), and by the nature and social context of the provider of assistance. The provider and recipient of help meet at a particular time and place in their lives, which sets the boundaries of their future interaction.

It is commonly noted that appropriate, effective and ethical social support should take into consideration the rights of the recipient to decide (or co-decide) about this assistance - whether it should be given, by whom, in what circumstances and form, and for how long. It should also take the subjectivity and autonomy of the helper and recipient into account.

First and foremost, assistance should be tailored to the needs of the recipient and favour supportive and understanding reactions, while the helper should show empathy, a capability for social perception and socially minded motivation to act to the benefit of others. The basis for assistance relations is mutual trust. Social and individual convictions regarding the sense of responsibility, agency, the need to commit (the proportions of motivational input and initiative from both the helper and the recipient), stereotypes in perceiving others, groups seeking assistance or renouncing it will also be of undeniable significance for the forms of assistance relations.

This monograph is divided along three theoretical axes. The first includes discussions on assistance processes, their different circumstances, and the specific nature of assistance relations from both the helper's and recipient's perspectives. The authors of particular chapters focus on the social and individual conditions of assistance, posing questions about the possibility of helping people who do not expect it. They also look at different kinds of counselling in everyday life and describe diverse forms of psychopedagogical intervention relating to people with limited independence, as well as analyzing relations focused on providing help with regard to dialogue and criticism inherent in them, and also the autonomy of participants in such relationships.

The second aspect of the topic relates to the specific nature of help provided to families. Support action and interventions undertaken in families in crisis are analyzed, reference is made to the systemic perspective on the family, which is treated as a patient collectively subjected to therapy, the essence of effective conditions for family therapy is shown and the idea of reinforcing the family as the basis of support action is introduced. Finally, there is a focus on help given to families with a chronically ill child and help given to underage mothers.

In the third part assistance is presented in terms of the specific nature of action addressed to selected groups of helpers and recipients. The discussion concentrates on the effectiveness of such help, its descriptive qualities, limitations and the dilemmas that accompany particular individuals giving and receiving assistance, that is, people living in a culture of poverty and those undergoing addiction therapy. There is an analysis of such forms of assistance as coaching and health education. The ability to put oneself in another's shoes is shown, as is the readiness to share and provide help as essential conditions for it to be effective. The issue of burn-out and among helpers and its circumstances are also referred to.

In this monograph the authors concentrate on concepts, discussions, analysis of empirical studies and the inspiration resulting from these, which are essential for a broad-ranging, in-depth examination of social reality and the role within it for activities in the field of assistance, social support and counselling that contribute to developing a theory of assistance.