

Social and individual contexts of assistance, social support and counselling

Volume 2

Empirical articles – Social practice

Summary

Today's social reality is characterized by unremitting change, a wide variety of ambivalences and ambiguities, with inherent uncertainty and the need to constantly take risks. It is an arena of daily practical and professional struggles that pose a range of challenges to the individual (cf. Bauman, 2006a, 2007a, 2007b; Beck 2002 Giddens, 2007; Melosik, 2004; Piorunek 2006, 2008a, 2008b, 2010). The transformation of society at the end of the 1980s necessitated a full spectrum of efforts on the part of individuals and social groups to adapt to this new fluid and complex reality, which abounds in risk and uncertainty, whose consequences might destabilize the course of individual and family life, engendering feelings of disappointment and disorientation that in turn lead to a wavering sense of self-worth with the need for support and assistance.

Whether directly or indirectly, the socio-economic situation shapes people's lives, and the challenges of daily life lead to an increasing number of people who are lost, in need or helpless. In such cases normal relations with their environment or with themselves are temporarily or permanently shaken; these are individuals who quite simply cannot deal with many aspects of daily existence.

The first part of the article focuses on the 'supported' and issues of assistance and support afforded to defavourised groups. It opens with Małgorzata Michel's article presenting the findings of field research in urban areas inhabited by excluded groups, in enclaves and ghettos of poverty. She introduces such concepts as: "the other life of the city", "street games in social exclusion", and "participatory exclusion". Using these concepts, she attempts to illustrate symbolic-interactionist dimension of the construction and reconstruction of the social order in the city's other life. The findings of the analysis framed in this way are relevant to social pedagogy and the creation of suitable educational processes in excluded urban areas based on the potential of their inhabitants.

Grzegorz Głupczyk's article focuses on the problem of "invisible youth", residing in socially defavourised areas. He notes how this "invisibility" refers to the period in which these young people come into conflict with the law or principles of social co-existence, thus becoming in a certain sense "invisible" to representatives of different institutions. It is usually the case that this "invisible youth" is recognised too late for effective prophylactic action to be taken.

The process by which individuals in foster care become independent is discussed by Patrycja Chrzanowska and Agnieszka Skowrońska – Pućka in the first part of Part 2 of this volume. Patrycja Chrzanowska draws attention to the crucial role of the carer in helping their charge become independent, while Agnieszka Skowrońska-Pućka concentrates on issues related to family reintegration, which becomes possible as a result of becoming independent.

Kamil Radzki presents the young offenders' institution environment as one that fosters subcultures, which he regards as hindering the resocialization process. Utilized appropriately, the scouting educational method can become an effective antidote not only to the effects of subcultures but also to prevent them coming to being.

Agnieszka Zaradna's chapter presents unemployed people, who she terms 'stigma carriers', and also the stigmatization experienced during the process aimed at supporting their re-entry into the labour market.

Joanna Kozielska takes up the issue of transnational dimension of counselling and social support for immigrants and refugees in the context of local social work. She emphasises how support and assistance should be organized tri-temporally: before the decision to leave one's country, during the time of emigration and after returning.

The first sub-chapter closes with the article by Robert Bartel, Janusz Rybakowski and Maja Stańko-Kaczmarek, who present the findings of research on people suffering from depression. The research goal was to track the transformation process during integration training in attentiveness techniques and art therapy, and also to check the impact of changes in rumination, worry and negative affect.

In countries with a stable modern economy – countries before the political transformation stage – what were once universal career forms have now changed and have become a full spectrum of opportunities and possibilities, fears and risks in the professional sphere. The instability of the labour markets and their dichotomous altered chances and threats they present forces individuals into constant lifelong learning and adopting a flexible approach to employment, thus giving the opportunity to use support and specialist counselling at each stage of a career path based on the individuals' resources.

Taking these factors into consideration the second thematic block is devoted to professional advisory services and voluntary work as factors fostering the potential to develop. The first article, written by Agnieszka Nymś-Górna and Anna Sobczak, deals with questions of professional advisory services for students. The authors emphasise the role and significance of educational and vocational advice for students in terms of the current labour market situation.

Barbara Chojnacka's article focuses on student volunteers and reveals the traps, dilemmas and controversies in the field of voluntary work in day centres.

The third article, written by Bernadetta Kosewska, presents the findings of empirical verification on the development of student volunteers' competences, while the value of voluntary work in foster families is discerned and described by Justyna Mielnik. In the next article Joanna Kozielska describes the student as a young emigrant performing "difficult, boring, dangerous" seasonal work, and in doing so draws attention to the significance of experiences as a migrant worker in developing career potential.

Beata Jakimiuk discusses job satisfaction and its constituent factors, concentrating on issues of social support in the workplace. The author points to the importance of social support at work as a factor shaping job satisfaction, motivation, and the employee's sense of fulfilment, as well as the culture, quality and atmosphere in the workplace. Her analysis looks at issues related to social support in the workplace and its functions, the determinants of job satisfaction and workplace relations and their link with satisfaction.

An important and frequently overlooked link in the process of providing assistance is the person giving this support. For this reason the third and final part is devoted to issues related to those offering help and the methods and forms of assistance and support, as well as good practice in the field of helping individuals and social groups in difficult life situations.

The first article, written by Ewa Grudziewska and Marta Mikołajczyk, draws attention to how the work of social workers, probation officers and representatives of the social services is burdened with numerous difficulties. However, the statistics show the year-on-year growth in the number of people entering such professions. The authors draw on their own research findings to outline the duties of social workers and probation officers, present the methods used in their work and their motivation for taking up such employment.

The next article refers to the individual and social contexts of supervised liberty and the dilemmas faced by probation officers regarding resocialization work for the adults in their care. Katarzyna Nanowska concentrates on defining the relations and forms of communication as key factors influencing changes in the attitudes of those on probation, and also on prompting reflections on the possibilities for change in the methods of rehabilitation programmes, which might serve as inspiration in the search for different models of offering assistance.

In their article, Agata Matysiak-Błaszczyk and Ewa Schneider portray the probation centre as a means of education and describe the issues related to providing support and assistance to minors. Renata Decka's article focuses on the work of the Mateusz Social Re-adaptation Centre as an example of the forms of assistance provided to those leaving penitentiaries.

In the next article, Tomasz Kasprzak raises the subject of alternative forms of assistance given to deaf mute individuals in the Czech Republic, describing Czech specialist counselling, family social welfare homes, support centres, professional advisory services and forms of financial assistance. The ageing population poses challenges to society with regard to securing the needs of an increasing number of elderly people requiring assistance. The authors of the two final articles present senior citizens in contrasting roles.

Rafał Iwański presents them as recipients of assistance, indicating how the main burden of social welfare lies on family members. By contrast, Magda Kalkowska presents senior citizens as individuals providing assistance, for example, supporting local initiatives. In her article she presents the essence of support and assistance provided by elderly members of society to children, young people, adults and other senior citizens.

The discussions in this volume indicate numerous problems related to welfare, counselling and social support that are significant from the theoretical and practical point of view and which defy simple categorisation and systematization. We cherish the hope that this book might prompt reflection on the multifaceted nature of human experience related to giving and receiving assistance and support in every aspect of the human lifetime. We trust that the content of this volume might lead to further empirical, theoretical and practical studies on welfare, counselling and social support.