Service User’s and student’s perception of Role Conflicts in Social Work with Families

Results from a Service User Involvement workshop

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Overview

• **Background:** Role Conflicts / Dual Mandate in child protection services

• **Research Question:** (How) do parents in residential facilities of child protection services experience role conflicts of social workers?

• **Study and Results:** Semi-structured Interviews embedded in SUI workshop, Content Analysis revealing major categories

• **Discussion:** Implications for social work in child protection services
Background: Role Conflicts

Social Roles „...denote demands set by the society regarding the behavior of position holders.“ (cf. Röhl, 1987)

- **Inter-Role Conflicts** *(between social roles)*
  - e.g. social worker as employee vs. social worker as parent

- **Intra-Role Conflicts** *(within one social role)*
  - e.g. assisting vs. controlling clients, e.g. in child protection services
Background: Intra-Role Conflicts in Social Workers / Dual Mandate

Conflict between two major aims of social work:

1. Focusing on individual well-being of clients (e.g. right of education) -> **Assistance**

2. Work for public interest/common good (e.g. child protection) 
   -> **Control**
Background
Definition of „Family“

Definition (Nave-Herz, 2006)
• at least two people in generation-relationship
  (one parent-child relationship)

→ Target group for SUI workshop:
  - single parents
  - families composed of father, mother and children
Research Question

• How do service users in residential facilities of child protections services experience assistance and control in social work?

• Are service users aware of intra-role conflicts experienced by social workers?

• Do service users have suggestions regarding the implementation of control?

• Do students benefit from a service user approach in dealing with role conflicts of social workers?
Methods
Service User Involvement in Social Work Education

Based on PowerUs network (PowerUs 2013): „gap mending“

Integration of SUI in BA-level course in Esslingen

• **5 students** of BA Social Work at Esslingen University of Applied Sciences meeting with SUs over longer period

• **Target group**: Families (one parental unit respectively) who got into difficulties raising young children

• **Aims**:
  - joint learning and sharing of experiences at eye level
  - change of perspectives
  - give voice to users & appreciate experiences and concerns
Methods

Procedure of SUI seminar

1. „Get-to-know“ – evening (2h)

2. One-day service user involvement seminar
   - Workshop two weeks after introduction evening
   - Participants: 5 single mothers (18–26 years)
   - Duration: 4 h (12:30 – 16:30)
   - Location: in residential facility

3. Semi-structured, problem-centered interviews
   - Participants: 6 single mothers, 1 single father (19–50 years)
Methods: Interview guideline

• Assistance and Control

  – What does „assistance“ mean to you?
  – Can you mention and describe a situation in which a Social Worker helped you? How did you experience it?
  – What does „control“ mean to you?
  – Can you mention and describe a situation in which a Social Worker controlled you? How did you experience it?

• Outlook and suggestions for change

  – Can you tell about situations in which you were controlled and which you would reappraise as good/helpful in retrospect?
  – What should be changed in assistance and support measures regarding control?
Results
Interviews - Categories

Assistance
• associated with support, individuality, commitment, expertise
  Power is considered as opposite of assistance
  Feedback can be given with appreciation

Control
• associated with observation, judgement, dependence, safety
• considered as necessary in order to accept and realise aids
• perceived as necessary especially in child endangerment
  – Feedback leads to positive reactions followed by positive consequences
  – Feedback is not taken seriously by some institutions
  – Youth welfare office is directly linked to control (seen as controller)
Results
Interviews - Categories

Intersection of assistance and control

• assistance and control are both associated with difficult situations (conflicts) as well as situations in daily life
• control can be reappraised as positive/helpful in retrospect if user can benefit from it

• forms of helpful control:
  - attention
  - active asking
  - inspection rounds
  - control of everyday tasks & organizational matters
  - assistance plan
  - parenting
Results
Interviews - Categories

Perception of Role Conflicts of Social Workers by parents in child protection services

- Parents are aware of role conflicts
- Addressing role conflicts explicitly is perceived as helpful
- For some parents, integrating assisting and controlling aspects of social worker role is challenging

Suggestions for modifications of residential facilities

- improvement of individual adjustment
- improvement of balance between control and assistance
- improvement of control in child endangerment
- improvement of qualification of personnel and staffing ratio
- Reducing control in order to support autonomy
Results: Perception of Role Conflicts by Students

- At the beginning of the SUI seminar, students had a good theoretical understanding of roles, role conflicts and the dual mandate

- Close contact with service users in residential facility brought these theoretical concepts "alive"

- Students reported becoming aware that being transparent about role conflicts in their contact with service users is important ("I know that you will not like this instance of control, but I am convinced that it is necessary at this moment")

- Students stressed importance of "justification of rules of control": these rules have to be grounded in ethics rather than in tradition or convention
Discussion

• Service Users in residential facilities of child protection services are aware of role conflicts in social workers

• Control is experienced as aversive but can be re-appraised with regard to role of social worker

• „helpful control“ as emerged category

• Control and assistance can be tolerated in one person if confidence and balance is given

• Service User Involvement methodology was very helpful to establish trust between students and parents
Thank you for your attention!
Literature


