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Children rights and social inclusion of orphan children in residential care institutions: a project in Shkoder Municipality

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Session Information

18 SES 09 JS, Championing the Rights of Children in Care

Joint Paper Session NW18 and NW25

Time:	2018-09-06
	09:00-10:30
Room:	D0.03
Chair:	Ann Quennerstedt

Contribution

In Albania institutions for orphan children are part of the legacy left by the totalitarian state, which established the policy based on the idea that the state is able to better care for children than their families. This policy continued for more than 50 years and left lasting traces on public attitudes and mentality of people in the country about the orphan children. Twenty-seven years after the political changes, the institutionalization of child care in Republic of Albania continues to be an unresolved issue that cannot be explained only with the totalitarian past. The process of decentralization and deinstitutionalization of children in Albania started in years 2000, but the most important phase was in 2005 with the implementation of social law 9355. Referring to deinstitutionalization in Central and Eastern Europe started in the 80's. This transition began after the political changes and accession into the European Union when these countries implemented the UNCRC and a child rights and protection focused approach into their legislation for the provision of health and social services (Sloten, 2017, pp.8-10). In Albania, from 2005 until 2013, there were any important change in social services, while in 2014 the government approved administrative and territorial reform that organize the country in 61 Municipalities imposing concrete implementation of decentralization and deinstitutionalization of social services. In the Municipality of Shkoder were established multiple institutions, both public and private, offering social services for orphans (Cabran, Finelli, Bradford, 2016, p.14). Placement of children within these established institutions depends on the child's age, geographic region of provenance, type of

orphan (biological or social), and disabilities. In the framework of a project financed by the Italian Agency for Cooperation and Development through Italian NGO IPSIA, and called "The community of the future: interventions of socio-work inclusion for Shkoder's orphans", a research group formed by University of Shkoder, University of Bologna, NGOs IPSIA and SHIS, was established in order to conduct a needs assessment of these services, their staff members and orphans. The research will orient the Municipality, the University of Shkoder and NGOs working in the territory, to plan future social interventions and improve the quality of life and inclusion of orphan children living in institutions. Main objectives of the research are: to get information about the organization of public and private institutions for orphan children in Shkoder Municipality; to get information about the implementation and respect of children rights in these institutions for orphan children; to identify different models of work in these institutions; to identify different challenges that these institutions are fronting; to analyse the level of inclusion/exclusion of those orphans from active citizenship and participation. Some of the research questions are: Which are the architectonical conditions of institutions and are they suitable for orphan children? Has the staff of institutions for orphan children the appropriate qualification to work with this target group? How is organized daily life in these institutions? How staff design and plan educational activities for individuals and community in the institution? How is the relationship between the staff and the orphan children? Do the institutions for orphan children cooperate with other educational agencies in the community? Is there in the territory an organized network of institutions supporting services for orphan children? Does the staff of residential institutions for orphans respect the rights of children like: right to education, to social inclusion and private life, to equality and to play for children and disabled people?

Method

This study is an empiric explorative one, mainly qualitative, and it is based on a mixed methodology (Creswell, 2003). It focused on 3 public orphanages, and 3 private children residential cares in Shkoder for a total of 87 staff members and 137 biological or social orphans, also with disabilities. Data were collected with field visits, semi structured questionnaires and five focus groups organized with: social workers/psychologists, directors, educators, support staff and NGOs collaborating with these institutions. Field visits aimed to meet staff members and present them the whole research and its objectives, and allowed a first look to building and educational settings, in addition to observing some practices. The questionnaire collected information about the history of each institutions, staff number, their backgrounds, experiences and continuous training, relations with other institutions, settings and daily activities, information about orphans. The 5 focus group involved from 5 to 9 participants, 4 of them were organized in a friendly and well known place (the residential institution for orphan children 3-6 year old), while the focus group with the representatives of NGOs working with social institutions for orphans was hold in one of these organizations. Focus group used the framework of UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), signed in Albania in 1990 and ratify in 1992. The main aim was to reflect together on children's rights instead of children's needs and to identify which competences and resources each institution (with different staff profiles) are able to activate in order to guarantee these rights. Changing the focus from needs to rights is not new in the scientific literature (United Nation, 2010; Dillon, 2010; D'Alessio, 2012) and many countries are investing in deinstitutionalization and inclusive education. But it is new in a country were culturally social services are sees more in terms of welfare and dependency than empowerment and inclusion. And were orphanages work to fulfil basic needs like accommodation, food, and clean clothes. Trough sentences related to UNCRC, focus groups collected impressions, reflections, and information about children's rights in these institutions, proposing different points of view and facing the difficulties that social services are living. And new challenges to face.

Expected Outcomes

This study determined how employees in these orphanages view their role, obligations and competencies to implement children right. Apparently many positives changes are growing among the different institutions. Staff and beneficiaries are more informed that in the past about children's rights, especially in the field of education, social inclusion and private life. Some institutions are proposing individual educational plan based on the abilities and interests of each orphan. But the research also highlighted that there is a lack of collaboration between staff members as well as an absence of planning and researching methodologies. This is mainly due to the initial training of the employees (not always related to the job they do and without the necessary skills), to the difficulties and complexity of the context and to a rigidity of professional practices that follows specific standards and does not help in findings creative solutions. Moreover professional roles are not so clear (who is doing what) and so children's rights are implemented superficially: children seem not to have an active role in their life's choice, they are not fully responsible for their own life and they are not encouraged in their autonomous decisions. Following this research, the Project "The community of the future: interventions of socio-work inclusion for Shkoder's orphans" is planning 4 trainings addressed to the 4 categories of employees (social workers, psychologists, educators and support staff members) to qualify their work, to promote a culture of inclusion, to foster competencies in the field of community networking, team work, project design, to offer more qualitative and inclusive social services. And this is a starting point, a challenge to deinstitutionalize, to implement new models of children residential communities and to respect children's rights.

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