
BOOK REVIEW

Kosher, H. et al.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND SOCIAL WORK

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The link between the social work profession and children's rights emerged since the 19th century and the social assistance has strongly influenced the movement for children's rights and the protection of children from abuse in the family or exploitation at work. But the awareness of children's rights and its expression in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child have important impact on social policy, institutions, and services for children, as they led to the establishment of new principles and values. Child protection services have therefore increased approaches appropriate to the new status of children in society, as persons with rights, and the social work has confronted the need to consider that in its practices and standards.

The profession of social assistance has had a historic commitment to protecting children. The reverse is also true, children's rights have contributed to the structuring of social assistance as a profession, the authors of the book show.

The purpose of this publication is to show influence of children's rights upon social work and aims to emphasize the special role of social workers in promoting children's rights, and in implementing them in daily practice.

The book is designed also as a textbook for students in the field, as at the end of each chapter, there is an exercise box, to help students/other readers to discuss and understand the ideas presented in the chapter.

Chapter one talks about the concepts of human rights, ethics and values in social assistance and practice in social work. For instance, authors talk about the visibility of

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social work in the global human rights movement (p. 6): “(1) *the profession’s emphasis on social and economic rights, rather than on civil and political rights that command more public attention;* (2) *the focus on vulnerable and socially excluded groups and not on the rights of all populations;* (3) *social work has a preference for the case approach rather than macro issues, which are more related to human rights;* (4) *the strict observance of confidentiality impeding use of cases to serve the wider cause;* (5) *social workers usually pay more attention to human needs than to human rights;* and (6) *the lack of sustained global leadership on human rights by the organizations representing the profession.*”, according to Healy (2008).

The second chapter refers at children's rights: *the discourse on children’s rights is relatively new, the authors show, even within the modern human rights discussion. Not long ago, it seemed absurd to talk about children’s rights; the concept of children’s rights gained widespread support only in the last few decades*” (p. 9). The chapter presents a historical perspective over children rights: the pre-industrial period, the industrial period-19th century to the middle of the 20th century, mid-20th century to the present, treaties and international conventions on the rights of the child, typologies of children's rights.

Chapter three refers to social assistance as referring to children's rights: a theory, and ethical vision, but also talks about history of social assistance to children, protection and insurance, the concept of ‘*every child matters*’, it talks about what happened in the late twentieth century to the present in the field. It also discusses why the child should be involved in welfare discussion.

“During the 19th century, societal efforts on behalf of children and families focused on dependent and neglected children. The period from the last third of the 19th century to the outbreak of the First World War was characterized by the forming of many voluntary organizations and child rescue organizations working in parallel to cope with the abandoned, orphaned children of the urban working class or those with ‘unfit’ parents. Until the 19th century Western world the family was regarded as the responsibility of the parents, thus there was minimal intervention in the family. It was only toward the end of the 19th century that laws across the Western world began to place the child’s welfare before the conduct and wishes of its parents.” (p.20).

Therefore, public attitudes towards child abuse changed, with concern growing about the practices of neglectful families and the need to ensure that children were raised as responsible citizens. As the attitude of the society progressively changed, the services and legislation also suffered transformations towards rights, inclusiveness, post-modern values.

Chapter 4 refers to children's rights and implications for practice, showing that the children’s right to participation is the core of the 20th century children’s rights movement. *“There is growing recognition that children should participate in forming their lives in various aspect and contexts, including in recent years children’s participation in the decision processes regarding their care and welfare. There is now a wide range of literature on this issue, including practical guides”* (p.35)

Chapter 5 talks about implications for research of the mentioned subjects. The chapter shows that studies on children’s rights have focused on four main domains. *“(1) The first is an evolving body of empirical research on the perception and attitudes of children and adults towards the concept of children’s rights. (2) A second domain is a focus on children’s participation rights.*

Studies have examined children's participation in the community, in civic society, and in the political arena. (3) Another body of studies, discussed above, is that examining children's participation in child protection processes in the welfare system. These studies have examined social workers' attitudes towards the idea of children's rights, the scope and nature of children's participation in the welfare system and the obstacles to children's participation. (4) A fourth domain of implementation research is investigating how the rights recognized in the Convention have been realized in practice in the various areas of society. The Convention is viewed as a standard-setting instrument and has formed the basis of a vast amount of implementation research" (p.45-46)

The topic is also relevant in the Romanian context of social assistance provision. A Report of the Organization 'Salvati Copiii' (published in 2019 and referring to children's rights) shows that one of the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child refers to the child's participation in activities and decisions concerning the children; in spite of all these, consulting, informing, involving in decision-making is still not a practice of public institutions in Romania, and there are no institutional tools required for this kind of involvement. In this context, the mentioned book can be a practical tool for Romanian practitioners in the field of social assistance and decision making.

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