

SOCIAL SERVICES FOR FAMILIES PROVIDED BY LOCAL GOVERNMENTS FROM A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS' REPRESENTATIVES PERSPECTIVE

(NORTH ALBANIA)

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Abstract

Providing families and individuals with social services is a process which requires the collaboration of all actors in role. One of the key elements of this process, while offering social services, is the collaboration between local governments and civil society organizations. This paper aims to represent how the representatives of non-profit organizations perceive the family services offered by the local government in northern Albania. Furthermore, the objective of this study is to identify how these representatives perceive the collaboration non-profit organizations and local public institutions in regard of social services offered to families. A qualitative research method has been used based on a semi-structured interview instrument. The interviewees were non-profit organizations' representatives offering direct and indirect social services for families in the major cities of northern Albania such as Shkoder, Lezhë, Kukës and Peshkopi. Findings of this research concluded that the local governments should offer more social services to families as well as provide a higher financial support through grants or auction services to the local non-profit organizations which on their hand offer social services to families. Based on these findings, the researcher recommends a stronger collaboration between non-profits and local government.

Keywords: collaboration, social services for families, non-profit organizations, local government.

1. Introduction

This paper aims to represent how the representatives of non-profit organizations perceive the family services offered by the local government in northern Albania. Furthermore, the objective of this study is to identify how these representatives perceive the collaboration non-profit organizations and local public institutions in regard of social services offered to families.

Support of families and individuals with social services is a process which requires collaboration of all actors. Non profit organizations play a fundamental role in offering social services in the study area. During their activity, they collaborate even with the public sector of social services. From this context it is important to get to know the perspectives of nonprofit organizations representatives for the services offered by the public sector in four districts in the northern part of our country.

2. Literature review

Local governance in the professional practise of its institutions faces with various challenges. According to European perspective there are identified a number of challenges in the context of restructuring of public social services. They act in a political environment in favour of measures by improving efficiency and quality of public services, services decentralized toward local level in order to improve system ability by being flexible and integrated, especially in response to deinstitutionalization, promotion of social involvement and creation of opportunities by having access in the minimal incomes and basic social rights, etc, (Munday, B., 2007). European Chart of Local Autonomy in his introduction stresses that protection and strengthening of local autonomy in different countries in Europe, constitutes an important aid toward building a Europe based on principles of democracy and power decentralization.

In the Albanian context it is largely increased the role of local power toward offering social services. Of a special importance are the reforms on the system of social services where, throughout decentralization process, local government positions have strengthened. In this way, decentralization of residential care service on community basis was realized through increasing capacities of local government for programming and establishing social services and also expanding the variety and geography of services according to population needs.

National legal framework, involving: Social Service Strategy (2005-2010), Law No. 9355 for “Social Services and Aid” (2005), Strategy of Decentralization and Local Governance and also Law No. 8652, date 31.07.2010 “For the organization and function of local governance”, Article 1. These documents contribute in the regulation, organization and function of the local government units in the Republic of Albania. But, the support of families and individuals with social services is a process, which requires a collaboration of all actors. Non profit organizations play an important role in offering social services, a role which for a long time has been uncared from the governments (Bastagli, F., 2013).

3. Methodology

The purpose of this study is to introduce the perception of the representatives of non-profit organizations toward the family services offered by the local government, especially by the public social services, in northern Albania, including the organizations that operate in the cities of Shkodër, Lezhë, Kukës and Peshkopi. This study was based on a qualitative research method. The instrument used for data gathering was the semi-structured interview.

The research questions of the study are:

1. How the representatives of non-profit organizations perceive the social services for families offered by the public social services offered in their city?
2. How the representatives of non-profit organizations perceive the collaboration with public social services offered by local government?

3.1. Sampling. The interviewees were non-profit organizations' representatives offering direct and indirect social services for families in the major cities of northern Albania such as Shkoder, Lezhë, Kukës and Peshkopi. A total of twenty-one interviews were completed.

3.2. General data for the participating organizations. In total, 21 representatives from non-profit organizations operating in the area of study have filled the interview. Shkoder District is represented in the study with the largest number of non-profit organizations operating in this field of study, whereas 3 other districts Lezhë, Kukës and Peshkopi were represented by a smaller number of non-profit organizations, and non-profit organizations operating on services and projects for family. There were representatives from 10 organizations in Shkodër, 4 from Lezhë and Peshkopi and representatives from 3 organizations in Kukës. Sixteen participants were female and five of them are men. The participants are of different ages. 8 participants are aged 26-35 years, 4 participants are aged until 25 years, 7 participants are aged 36-45 years and 2 participants are aged 46-55 years. Regarding the level of education, 11 respondents have higher education and 10 respondents have master degree level. Most of the interviewees are in the position of coordinators (10 of them), 4 of them are in the position of projects managers, 4 participants are executive directors, 2 social workers and 1 psychologist. Participants, who filled the semi-structured interview, belong to different professions. Only 15 of them accepted to declare their profession. 4 of the respondents are social workers, 2 of them are psychologists, 4 of the respondents are lawyers and teachers, and also 1 of the respondents is an environment expert. The representatives of non-profit organizations, who filled semi-structured interviews, had different years of work experience in recent organizations and also in organizations of civil society. 7 respondents have 1-5 years work experience in the civil society organizations, 6 of them have 6-10 years work experience and 8 of them have more than 10 years work experience. In the recent organization, there are 11 respondents have 1-5 years work experience, 9 respondents have 6-10 years work experience and 1 respondent over 10 years work experience. This is reflected in a summary manner in the table 3.8. Representatives of

non-profit organizations have an average of 5.8 years work experience in recent organization and 8.5 years work experience in organizations of civil society.

3.3. Instrument. Data collection was achieved through the instrument of the semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews include thirteen questions, where six of them provide socio demographic data. Some of the topics included in the interview were part of the dissertation theme, which is related to the evaluation of social services for family offered by public sectors and non-profit organizations. In this article are treated only topics related to perspectives of non-profit organizations representatives, concerning social services for family offered by public sector in the field of study.

3.4. Procedure. The participants were presented with the confidentiality policy and anonymity was insured not using their real names and presenting the data in an aggregate form. The interviews have been filled out by the participants themselves and most of them were sent via email (the participants felt more comfortable in this way and manage the time of completion of the interview according to their agenda), in order to respect their agenda and necessary time to complete them.

3.5. Method of analysis. The process of defining main topics and establishing of categories was achieved manually. All interviews were printed in a format with enough space for respective remarks. During this process were identified topics used by each subject, by setting respective numbers every time those topics were displayed in each interview. During the reading process of all inputs and data, there were identified the use of similar topics, which fitted together. In this stage, the data coding process was implemented. After setting the list of topics used by subjects, the data were organized in categories, and then respective codes were settled for each category. The primary coding process was implemented. In the second stage of data analyzing, respectively after setting the main categories, it was implemented the process of interpretation of each category, in order to verify if categories were related to each other in any way and if there was a chance to create alternative categories (subcategories), including more common data with each other. In this stage, through confrontation and comparison of categories, there were analyzed the similarities and differences between settled categories.

4. Findings of the study

4.1. The perception of the representatives of non-profit organizations regarding the social services for families offered by the public social services offered in their cities.

Representatives of nonprofit organizations, assess social services for families offered from local government at non satisfactory levels. Representatives of nonprofit organizations assess as a problem, the absence of services at commune level, and also consider the payment of EA (Economic Aid) as a service which supports families in need. They claim that the public sector of social services in the study area has only a monitoring and coordinating role. A large part of the nonprofit organization representatives think this sector sees social services for family related to the financial sustain.

“The municipality should increase the diversity of social services they offer and extend them widely”. (Psychologist)

“The range of these services should be extended, because actually it is offered a service against violence in families and a service toward children protection. I think that looking to large problems of families in need, the diversity of services should be extended.” (Social Worker)

“Social services offered are not at the optimal rate. Homeless families, head women unemployed, lonely elderly without support etc.” (Teacher)

“It is a problematic fact that except families included in the economic aid scheme, there is no other service offered in help of families in need.” (Social Worker)

“Services are of a small amount and limited. The value of the economic aid is very small, compared to a family need in order to ensure the minimum of living.” (Executive Director)

“Social services are seen only as a financial sustain, there are no other ideas how children, youth in danger or vulnerable families can be helped.” (Executive Director)

“Social services require a large extension in the field and consider many problems within families. Local government actually plays only a monitoring role. The only service is offered by the economic aid office.” (Social worker)

Only some respondents assess as a contribute in the field of social services for families, the function of children protection unit, office for the protection from violence in families, and also in some cases the support of respective commune offices. After all, it is noted that administrative bureaucracies stumble the process of service benefiting and it is not noted any commitment by the local govern in order to improve the situation related to social services for families.

“Due to bureaucracies people are obligated for long periods of time, to wait for institution leaders to obtain a service.” (Teacher)

“It is noted an improvement toward social services in the country, by creating the social service office, which plays at the same time the role of coordinating different non-profit organizations for the support and solution of different cases presented at this office. Implementing the aid for children and women experiencing violence in families, has led many women to find consulting, orientation and emotional support.” (Lawyer)

“For the problems Albanian families are facing in general, our municipality has no commitment to be seriously involved in improving the situation.” (Lawyer)

4.2. The perception of the collaboration with local government with local government from the representatives' perspectives of non-profit organizations.

Representatives of nonprofit organization assess as a strong point of collaboration the commitment of local units for social services in respective Municipalities, in order to support

organizations. This collaboration is more related to the identification of problematic cases, activity coordination, and also involvement in common information activities. It is assessed also as a strong point of collaboration between non-profit organizations and public sector for social services in the study area, the efforts in order to create collaboration networks, concerning violence problems in families. Representatives of non-profit organizations, in most of cases, explain that local units for social services present commitment for administrative collaboration and offer consulting and also assess the role and contribution of organizations in social services field. These elements are assessed by the representatives of non-profit organizations as strong points of collaboration.

Representatives of public sector for social services, consider as weak points of collaboration, the over placement of services, concentration of non-profit organizations in urban areas and in some cases, their independent acting by non collaborating with the local government. They suggest some changes concerning improvement of the relationship with non-profit organizations operating in the northern part of the country. Firstly, they stress the fact of increasing collaboration between these two sectors, by making these relationships more correct, and also by finalizing these collaborations with proper agreements. Secondly, it should be possible to avoid the over placement of services and to increase the collaboration toward terms of referral.

5. Conclusions

In general the representatives of non-profit organizations claim the fact that public sector in the study area offer few social services for families in need, which is considered as a non sufficient contribute in order to fulfill all the large needs these families have. The respondents stress the fact that it is needed an improvement in the organization process of social services for families, offering a larger diversity of these services and also it is needed extension of services in every local unit. In general there is a good relationship between the non-profit organizations and local government, but there is still a lot to be done in this aspect.

Many of the respondents perceive good relationship with the local government and especially with the Social Service Office and other respondent emphasize that it is needed improvement. This claims the fact that collaboration is focused more on information exchange, offering human resources, the environment, statistic information and not financial support. It is evaluated as a strong point the support and organization of common activities with local government, also the tentative in order to create a network for family protection concerning violence problems.

6. Recommendations

Based on the theoretical, empirical findings and on conclusions derived, it is necessary to consider certain recommendations related the field of social services for families:

- Increasing the local government support and collaboration for the non-profit organizations in order to achieve more effective social services for families.
- Increase the budget by the local government, in order to have more social services and a better financial collaboration and support for the non-profit organizations.
- Applying the tender for social services by effecting an increase in the quality of services for families.
- The organization of more meetings in collaboration with the local government in order to address even other problems related to family.
- Taking of measures to overcome and minimize bureaucratic barriers to apply and benefit from public social services.
- Given the fact that civil society organizations offer diverse services for families, should be mobilized toward grant support from local government related to social services for family.

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