

Research notes: Two Doctoral Dissertations of Social Work Approved at the University of Eastern Finland

Nummela, Tuija 2011. *The Position and Rights of Clients in Social Work for Adults*. Publications of the University of Eastern Finland. Dissertations in Social Sciences and Business Studies No 17. Kuopio. (Written in Finnish with as English abstract)

Sipilä, Anita 2011. *Dimensions of Social Work Expertise – Knowledge, skills and ethics from an employee's standpoint in municipal social work*. Publications of the University of Eastern Finland. Dissertations in Social Sciences and Business Studies No 28. Kuopio. (Written in Finnish with as English abstract)

In both dissertations the professional role of social work was researched on the basis of empiric aldata. The study of Tuija Nummela was based on interviews of 24 full time social welfare officials, nine social workers in adult services and 13 clients of adult social services. The data was analyzed using qualitative content analysis. The study of Anita Sipilä was based on a quantitative survey of 119 social workers and their supervisors in Southeast Finland.

Tuija Nummela's study revealed that individual adult social service clients are not very aware of their social rights, nor does the social welfare system make those rights well known. Clients expect from social welfare officials above all equal treatment, clarification of their social rights, and a comprehensive understanding of their social needs and life situation. Clients were dissatisfied especially with failings in use of the living allowance system. Personal client service is provided by social workers but through assessment screening with unclear criteria. The study demonstrated that making client's social rights visible and defending them is an important part of delivery of services in social work with adults. To develop adult social welfare services further, an increase in service oriented work ethics seems to play an important role, as well as improving online services and other co-operative activities.

Anita Sipilä's study showed that the Finnish social workers are most familiar with societal issues and factors influencing both physical and mental health as well as psychosocial and legal expertise knowledge. They tend to identify the ability for identifying different kinds of problem situations as a neutral expert as the most important professional ability in social work. Another important ability was case-management skills. Meeting and treating the client in a humane way, and with equality and fairness were emphasized as central ethical principles. The study pointed out that the legal-administrative tradition regulates the practical implementations of social work as a moral obligation to adapt to the doctrines of the municipal enterprise group. The managerialist and commercialization tendency in the public administration is seen to challenge social work to strengthen its professional capacity.

Both dissertations confirmed that the Finnish social work is strongly focused on dealing with citizens' social rights and sticking fast to the social welfare system. Professional ethics is

considered to be a significant element of social worker's expertise in terms of a legal-administrative orientation and exercising public power based on citizens' equal rights. The fundamental task of social work is to promote equality and social justice by confirming the legal protection for citizens.

Juha Hämäläinen

Pauli Niemelä

Raija Väisänen